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SERMONS

BY THE LATE

Rev. *K* GEORGE LYON,

MINISTER OF THE GOSPEL,

STRATHMIGLO.

To which is prefixed,

A SHORT ACCOUNT OF THE AUTHOR.

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THE
L I F E
OF THE
Reverend GEORGE LYON,
Late Minister of the Gospel at *Strathmiglio*.

MR GEORGE LYON was son to Mr James Lyon, minister of the Gospel at Blairgowrie, descended of a younger branch of the noble family of Strathmore. His mother's name was Allison Gillespie, daughter of the late Mr George Gillespie, his immediate predecessor. Mr Gillespie, whose character was universally respected, was descended of very worthy and honourable ancestors. He was grandson to the gentleman of the same name, who was one of the members from Scotland, of the famous Assembly of Divines which met at Westminster.

The Author of the following Sermons was born the 17th day of February 1729. He was educated at the grammar-school of Dundee, and studied at the university of St Andrews.

He was licensed to preach in the year 1752; and, soon after, he came to Strathmiglo to visit his grandfather, who being then in an infirm and declining state of health, kept him as his assistant. While he officiated in that capacity, the congregation discovered a very strong attachment to him; and the proper steps having been taken, with the consent and cordial approbation of Mr Gillespie, he was ordained as his assistant and successor in May 1754, to the great satisfaction of the whole parish. Mr Gillespie died about two years after, in the 56th year of his ministry.

In the year 1757, he married Sophia Marshall, youngest daughter of the reverend David Marshall, late minister of the gospel in Kirkaldy, who survives him, and by whom he had several children. His eldest son, James, a very promising young man, died at St Andrews, where he was studying divinity, in the year 1782. In the year 1779, his second son David went out in the Loyalist privateer of Greenock, which ship, after she sailed from Greenock, was never afterwards heard of;—it is believed she
foundered;

foundered at sea. Two sons and three daughters are still alive.

He continued minister of Strathmiglo till his death, which happened very unexpectedly on the 16th February 1793. He was in his ordinary state of health on the morning of the day on which he died. After family worship, a duty which he regularly performed, he complained of a pain in his temples, and in a few minutes he appeared to be altogether insensible. Medical assistance was immediately procured, and every mean of recovery was attempted in vain. He died about 7 o'clock in the evening, to the inexpressible grief of his congregation, and much and sincerely regreted by all who were honoured with his acquaintance.

The great outlines of his character were, fervent piety towards God, unaffected simplicity of manners, and undeviating integrity of heart. The natural effects of these, were great respectability as a minister of the gospel, the affection and esteem of his family and friends, together with steadiness and uniformity in his public conduct. The modesty of his nature prevented him from dis-

playing the powers of his mind ; but when his duty required it, he never failed to exert them. Hence, in every important action of his life, he enjoyed the peculiar felicity of making the principles of his conduct conspicuous and apparent ; and the principles of his conduct he never needed to conceal.

He possessed that uninterrupted equanimity of temper which made him bear injury without resentment, and that amiable gentleness of disposition which disposed him on every occasion to think favourably, and to speak favourably of mankind. It pleased God to bring his faith to the touchstone ; and in the greatest trials of his life, he conspicuously illustrated the doctrines of meekness and resignation, which he constantly taught.

We cannot better conclude this short account of his life and character, than by some extracts from sermons, preached by the Reverend Mr Martin of Monimail, from Job v. 26. soon after our Author's death, and from Zech. i. 5. on the occasion of introducing his son as his successor.

“ One

“ One of the natural advantages of religion is longevity. The dispositions and conduct of those who are truly religious, preserve them from many things that are injurious to health and old age. They are free from the havock which passion, strife, and care, make on the constitution. They live and walk in love, in temperance, in purity and peace. Wisdom holds length of days in her right hand. God, in his all-ruling providence, in a thousand various ways, hath rescued his people from disease, and danger, and death; hath, in a remarkable manner, preserved alive the souls of his servants. This promise and description have often been justified and realized.

“ Thou shalt come to thy grave in a full age, like as a shock of corn cometh in, in his season.

“ What man is there that does not wish to see many days? Yes, days of enjoyment are universally desired. Life is endeared to those who perceive and enjoy the effects of their own plans and counsels and exertions; who find they are useful to the world, and dear to their friends and to their families, and that their children arise and call them, and thus truly render them, blessed. Life continues

continues precious while the faculties remain, the graces and virtues of the divine life increase, and the work of righteousness is peace, and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance, and the hoary head is a crown of glory. An aged saint is well compared to a shock of corn that cometh in, in his season : full of days, of peace, and of honour ; respected of men, beloved and honoured of God, he is gathered to his fathers. As a shock of corn, he is ripened in goodness and in worth : As a shock of corn, lodged in safety, he is out of the reach of injury : As a shock of corn, he is added to the precious collection in the celestial granary, to which at length will be joined the complete harvest of the saints, with Him who is the resurrection and the life, with Christ the first fruits, at the great day of the Lord.

“ I question not, my brethren, that the words we have been considering, occasion much searching of heart among you, at this time. A recent, an affecting, a most interesting event, rushes into your thoughts. You say, Yes, the words of Eliphaz are fulfilled. Did not *he* come to his grave as a shock of corn cometh in, in his season ?— I find I must check myself. In reviewing that event, in considering and discoursing of the mature worth, the character, the happiness of your highly respected and much beloved pastor, I should be unfitted for continuing the

the service; and you, many of you, from attending to it with that composure it requires. I only say, then, in one view, what an enviable event! respect, usefulness, enjoyment entire to the very last! In another, the event is most affecting. I need not say, to whom: I need not say, in what.—Yet, I must add, and do not you allow, my friends—yes, you must allow, the most afflicted of you must confess, that comfort predominates:—For, do not we all exclaim, “Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord:” “They rest from their labours, and their works follow them.”

“The death of a faithful minister of religion is peculiarly interesting and affecting.

“Yes, say many, the memory of whatever is most interesting and affecting, is connected with the remembrance of our worthy pastor: For, under his ministry, and by the blessing of God on his labours, we were first made to think seriously of our condition; his prayers were heard; his counsels were received; we were convinced, and changed, and edified, and comforted. His example directed and animated us: in the hour of distress and sorrow, his consolations and prayers relieved and restored our souls.

“Though a faithful minister is desirous to be useful to all his congregation, according
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to the variety of their situations and characters, as he is able to discover them, and has opportunities of contributing to the best interests of his people; there are some who are more interested in him, and to whom he can be more useful than to others, to whom, therefore, his departure must be peculiarly affecting.

“ Friendship results from more intimate acquaintance, and frequency of intercourse; from similarity of dispositions, and opportunities of good offices; from tried affection, and from tried worth. Friendship binds men closely together. Jonathan loved David as his own soul. “ If a friend is as thine “ own soul;”—if so dear a friend, a friend dear because of affection and worth, is removed,—separation must be severely felt, especially after the enjoyment of the advantages and endearments of amity for many years. You have lost a minister, say they to their neighbours; we have lost a minister and a friend, who shared in our joys and our sorrows, and in whose advice and affection we could always confide.

“ I descend into a deeper vale of affliction and of sorrow, when I describe the loss, and therefore the distresses, of nearer relations. I will not renew their exquisite sufferings. It is perhaps too much, to have opened the tender scene: though, who can pass it without attention? who can open it without emotion, and without advantage?

“ It

“ It will serve to relieve us from the effects of this tender subject, to observe, that a striking and interesting circumstance in the death of a faithful minister is, his character and usefulness remaining entire to the end of life.

“ Such honour have not all men : such honour have not all the saints. Old age, alas ! often presents us with that which excites our pity, rather than our veneration. When debility appears in the mind as well as in the body ; when the mind decays before the body, and the faculties are much impaired ; when disease of body is added to the sadder affliction of an enfeebled, exhausted, distempered mind, a mind of peevishness and complaining, of anxiety and fear, a lengthened existence cannot be desirable ; and death is rather to be chosen than life. But the man of piety, of usefulness, of respectability, moving onwards, to the very end of life, in the uninterrupted course of duty, and possessing all that duty and worth secures, we contemplate as peculiarly favoured of God. Our sincere regret and lamentation are mingled and softened, and almost lost, in our admiration of the enviable lot of the friend of heaven. Our hearts are composed in regarding the contrast that forces itself on our observation. What a difference betwixt them and their surviving friends, and those who have dragged on life, long after the days of strength of body, and vigour of mind,
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and real enjoyment were ended: their friends relieved, and even comforted on the long expected dissolution.

“ The case of Moses was perhaps without example in any age. His eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated: But we could reckon up not a few in our own time, who, according to the conviction of all who knew them, resembled Simeon; and might have said with him, “ Now lettest thou thy servants depart in peace, our eyes have seen thy salvation.” Your thoughts and mine, my brethren, are very naturally turned to a particular instance, at present, of usefulness, respect, and active duty, entire to the very last.—Has not every one of us reason to say, as I do, from the bottom of my soul, on considering this very memorable, affecting, yet comfortable event,—“ Let me die the death of the righteous! Let my last end be like his!”

PREFACE.

THE sermons here offered to the public, the subscribers, in general, know to be posthumous. That their Author might have once entertained the idea of giving a few of them to the world, is rendered somewhat probable, from the circumstance of corrected copies of several having been found among his papers. But the impression of the present volume was not planned by him. It is published by his surviving friends, in compliance with the general desire expressed among all who were acquainted with his piety and usefulness, and particularly by the members of his own congregation, that some memorials of his teaching, and of his labours of love, might be preserved; and that, though they were deprived of his personal presence, he might still live among them, and profit their immortal souls, by his holy counsels, and heaven-learnt wisdom. It must share, therefore, in the disadvantage attending every publication in similar circumstances, of being unprepared by its author, for the press: many things must be less fully unfolded; many

less accurately finished, than if he himself had been their editor. Every attention, however, has been used, to select such discourses as appeared to be most complete: and trouble and pains, to a degree that has considerably retarded the appearance of the volume, have been taken, to render it as correct, as fidelity to the originals, and to the public, would admit. Every sermon has been carefully revised; and, in order to prevent the repeated printing of the same things, has been closely compared with the others, upon similar topics. Notwithstanding this attention, however, it has been impossible, without a daring freedom of alteration, to prevent, in a few instances, a repetition of particular expressions and ideas. It is naturally accounted for, from the similarity of the occasions on which some of the sermons were delivered; and from the relation that subsists between many of the subjects.

But, though published, doubtless, with various disadvantages, there is good reason, the Author's friends assure themselves, to trust, that, in these discourses, the humble believer will receive, and will thankfully discover an abundant supply, at once, of evangelical comfort and direction. He will peruse the exercises of a holy mind, which believed, and which practised, as it taught: and he will gladly perceive the great doctrines of religion, which form the chief theme of his meditations,

ditions, and are the foundations of his happiness, so fully and solemnly inculcated. Amid the tears, therefore, which the friends of the Author shed over his memory, they rejoice to think, that many may yet be profited by his labours, and may yet thank him in the kingdom of heaven, for the instruction and encouragement which is contained in the following pages :—instruction and encouragement, delivered with such perspicuity of language, and simplicity of manner, as to be adapted for the benefit of every capacity, and of every rank.

It is evident, from the whole tenor of these discourses, that the author's great object was, to be profitable and instructive to those whom he addressed : and it was with him a matter of conscience, and of study, to adapt every expression, and every argument, to the capacity of even the most uninformed amongst them. What would be useful to them, he preferred to that ornament and polish, which, however it might have added to the reputation of his genius and taste, would have little tended to the edification of his flock. In their hearing, he would have been sorry to have employed a word or thought, that was above their comprehension ; or to have pleased the ear of the learned and the polite, at the expence of the great body of his people. It is hoped, however, that the style, though plain, and sometimes even familiar,

miliar, will never be found *low*; or the sentiments mean. This simplicity is, by no means, inconsistent with correctness: and the taste, which is not altogether fastidious, may discover, that, in these sermons, it perfectly accords with much energy, both of thought and of diction.

Readers, who admire only those elegant and highly finished delineations, either of virtue in general, or of particular graces, *as considered merely in themselves*, will not here meet with a food much adapted to their intellectual appetite. But the devout Christian will find what is more for his advantage: he will find universal excellence and particular duty, enforced from their connection with the great articles of his faith; and deriving from it a commanding influence on his heart, infinitely superior to all that they could receive from the most elegant description, and the subtlest argumentation, where that connection is disregarded, or brought but slightly into view. The Author, as a *minister of the gospel*, did not consider it his office to be a mere teacher of moral philosophy and ethics. While, therefore, he earnestly recommended every virtue, and endeavoured to encourage it by an unblameable example, he uniformly made the peculiar doctrines of the gospel the grand basis of his arguments, and the leading theme of his admonitions; and in these,
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he knew, and he felt, that virtue had her best security, and most universal support.

The sermon preached on the occasion of the Author's death, is, at the desire of many who heard it delivered, annexed to this volume; and it is hoped, both on account of the general truths which it contains, and the particular applications, that it will afford an agreeable entertainment to the reader.

There is a sufficient number of sermons yet remaining among the Author's manuscripts to fill another volume equal in size to the present; and if it shall be desired by a respectable number of subscribers or others, it may at some future period be offered to the public, at the expence and hazard of the publisher. The reason for mentioning this at present is, that if the demand should make the second volume necessary, it is intended to give along with it, *gratis*, in order to suit the conveniency of subscribers, title pages for a first and second volume.

The reader will not be displeased to find, that he has 12 sermons more than was offered in the subscription papers. The smallness of the type was the occasion of this. The number originally proposed was 18; and that number, in such a type as is usually employed in similar publications, would have fully sufficed. The Editor hopes, that the
knowledge

knowledge of this circumstance, together with his limitation in point of time, will plead his excuse with the reader of discernment, who may occasionally remark either inaccuracies or repetitions, which otherwise might have been more easily prevented.

FEBRUARY 16. }
1794.

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CONTENTS.

N. B. The Sermons distinguished by an asterisk, are
Action Sermons.

SERM.	Page
I. <i>The evidences and illustration of Christ's resurrection,</i>	1
II. <i>The circumstances and benefits of Christ's ascension,</i>	16
III. <i>The blessings of Christ's purchase sufficient for support and happiness *,</i>	31
IV. <i>The invitation to the blessings of Christ's purchase considered *,</i>	44
V. <i>The nature and pleasures of devotion *,</i>	55
VI. <i>Christ the desire of all nations *,</i>	68
VII. <i>The fulness of Christ illustrated,</i>	85
VIII. <i>Resignation to God under the afflictive dispensations of his Providence inculcated,</i>	99
IX. <i>The same subject continued,</i>	108
X. <i>Death the termination of temporal enjoyment,</i>	117
XI. <i>Death the separation of the soul from the body,</i>	126
XII. <i>Death the entrance into an untried state,</i>	132
XIII. <i>The grounds of encouragement under affliction stated,</i>	141
XIV. <i>On Christian obedience, and the influence of bad example,</i>	153
XV.	

SERM.	Page
XV. <i>The sacrifice of Christ worthy of admiration and gratitude,</i>	167
XVI. <i>On Hypocrisy and the danger of it *,</i>	181
XVII. <i>On religious indifference,</i>	196
XVIII. <i>The example of Christ a perfect standard for the imitation of Christians,</i>	208
XIX. <i>On perseverance in the love of Christ,</i>	223
XX. <i>On steadfastness in the work of the Lord,</i>	238
XXI. <i>On abounding in the work of the Lord,</i>	251
XXII. <i>On imitating the moral perfections of God,</i>	263
XXIII. <i>On Satan's temptations, and the manner of resisting them,</i>	277
XXIV. <i>On the necessity and manner of Divine influence,</i>	290
XXV. <i>The nature and obligations of religious concern,</i>	304
XXVI. <i>The conversion of sinners a just cause of joy,</i>	319
XXVII. <i>On praising God *,</i>	332
XXVIII. <i>On the presence of Christ in the ordinances of religion *,</i>	346
XXIX. <i>On the happiness of a future state,</i>	361
XXX. <i>The death of the saints precious in the sight of the Lord.—The substance of a sermon preached at Strathmiglo, February 24th 1793, on the death of the reverend George Lyon, by the reverend James Lister, A. M. minister of the gospel, Auchtermuchty,</i>	375

SERMON I.

THE EVIDENCES AND ILLUSTRATION OF CHRIST'S RESURRECTION.

MATTHEW xxviii. 6.

He is not here, for he is risen, as he said: come, see the place where the Lord lay.

THE prediction of our Saviour, concerning his crucifixion and death, was now accomplished. His enemies had nailed him to the cross; and he bowed the head and gave up the ghost. During this scene of affliction to the Son of God, his avowed disciples had forsaken him, and fled. The common ceremonies of burial, and the attendance and respect which all nations have given to the dead, would have been neglected in this instance, if Joseph of Arimathea, a rich man, and a disciple of Christ in his heart, had not begged his body from the Roman governor, and laid it in his own tomb. While he was employed in this honourable service, Mary Magdalene, and another Mary, the mother of James and Josès, who beheld the crucifixion afar off, were sitting over-against the sepulchre. The memory of our Saviour's character, and gratitude in Mary Magdalene, for the miracle which he had wrought in her cure, had a more powerful effect on these pious women,

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men, than a constant series of miracles, a continued display of the purest excellence, and than the plainest predictions of his death had on his immediate disciples. The testimonies of their respect were not here terminated; for as soon as the Jewish Sabbath was over, on the dawning of the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene, and the other Mary, to see the sepulchre. They thought not, any more than his other followers, of his resurrection from the dead; but their love to their Master was more ardent; and they came with sweet spices to anoint his body. “And behold, there was a great earthquake;” “for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it. His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow. And for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men. And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye; for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here, for he is risen, as he said: come, see the place where the Lord lay.”

In these words you may observe the particular ground of encouragement and comfort which the angel gives to these disconsolate women;—He is not here; his body is not now in the tomb where you left it. But as this alone would have deprived them of the melancholy consolation of doing the last offices of kindness to his dead body, he is in haste to inform them of his astonishing victory over the power of death. The word *risen*, in the original language, is expressive of that active power, or self-animating principle, by which the Son of God raised himself from the dead:—But he is risen, as he said. His resurrection is the fulfilment of what he himself so frequently foretold; why then should it appear incredible? The request which the angel makes to the two women in the last part of the verse, “Come, see the place where the Lord lay;” although it was extremely natural, yet, were it to stand alone, it could afford

afford no absolute proof of the resurrection. The tomb might be empty, and yet the Saviour of the world not restored to life. The circumstance, at the same time, was extremely natural; because, in the situation in which the women were placed, the empty sepulchre was the first kind of conviction they would require; for, had he been there, he was not risen. But, still farther, in the connection in which this request stood, it afforded them the highest possible evidence of the fact: After they were convinced that the body of their Master was not in the grave, there was no other way of accounting for the earthquake, for the appearance of the angel, and the consternation of the Roman guards, than that he was risen with power and authority from the dead.

It is of the greatest importance to Christians to have their minds well established in the belief of this fact; for the resurrection of Christ is the great and leading evidence of the truth of our religion; the circumstance on which our faith, our hope, and our happiness, do finally depend.

The Christian revelation was the subject of prophecy under the Old Testament dispensation; it was rendered credible by the reasonableness of its doctrines; it was supported by the miracles which our Saviour wrought; but it was only by this last and concluding evidence, that it was for ever ascertained to all generations: for if Christ had continued in the state of the dead, all the proofs of his divine mission would have been of no avail. The prophecies would have appeared wonderful, but never completely fulfilled. The doctrine which he taught would have continued reasonable; but its Author had perished. The miracles of his life would have remained astonishing, but confuted by his death. His enemies would have continued to insult him in the language of his persecutors, "He saved others, himself he could not save;" and his friends, who loved his doctrine, and looked for salvation by him, could but have joined with the desponding disciples, "We trusted it had been he,

“ who should have redeemed Israel.” In a word, as the apostle Paul expresses it, “ If Christ had not risen, our preaching had been vain, and your faith also vain.”

The resurrection of Christ, then, being a fact of so great importance, it is certainly of the highest moment to our faith in him, and to our comfortable hope of pardon and salvation, that our minds be well assured of its truth.

In discoursing on this most important and comfortable subject, I shall endeavour to lay before you, *first*, The evidences of our Lord’s resurrection. *Secondly*, The manner and circumstances of it. And, *lastly*, conclude with a few practical reflections.

I. Let us attend to the evidences of our Lord’s resurrection. And, in doing this, I shall mention a few plain facts, and endeavour to confirm them by some plain observations.

1. The resurrection of Christ was frequently predicted by himself before his death, both to his disciples and to the Jews. Six days before the transfiguration, “ Jesus began to shew unto his disciples “ how that he must suffer many things, and be killed, “ and be raised again the third day.” And as he was descending from the mountain of transfiguration, he charged the three disciples, saying, “ Tell the vision “ to no man, until the Son of man be risen from “ the dead.” For the same purpose, on his last journey to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples apart in the way, and said to them, “ Behold, we go up to “ Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be betrayed “ unto the chief priests and to the scribes, and they “ shall condemn him to death, and the third day he “ shall rise again.” But, besides these plain intimations to his disciples, he gave some obscure hints of his resurrection to the Jews at large. When they required of him a sign from heaven, he said to them, “ Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise “ it up again;” and when they mistook his meaning,
and

and understood it of the temple at Jerusalem, the evangelist informs us, that he spoke of the temple of his body.

These predictions of our Saviour suggest several observations, which tend to confirm his resurrection. He not only informs them that he was to rise on the third day; but, at the very same time, he informs them that he was to be put to death in a public manner. The truth of this part of the prophecy, as depending on the malice of his enemies, could not be counterfeited; and the fulfilment of this gives credit to the whole. For though you suppose, that the mere regard to reputation would make an impostor concert with his followers the scheme of a resurrection; yet, in this case, he would not blend with the prophecy of his death, those circumstances which would make it impossible for them to carry on the deception. We see farther, from the history of our Saviour, that this prediction had gained no credit with his disciples. In no part of their lives do they seem to have been capable of conducting any intricate operations of deceit. They were undesigning, illiterate, simple, but honest men. And at the present crisis, their hopes were extinguished; they were dispersed, and scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd. There is not the least probability, from their character, that, in their present situation, they would make any attempt to impose on mankind; and if, on the other hand, they gave any credit to their Master's prediction, they would wait the event in anxiety and suspense. But when we consider the history of their conduct, in connection with the prediction of our Saviour, the circumstance most worthy of observation is, that if the whole had been an imposition, their conduct would have been represented in a different manner. It would have been much more natural for the inventor of such a history, or the abettor of such an imposition, to have told us, that his immediate followers gave credit to his prophecy, and firmly expected beforehand that he would rise from

the dead. The sacred regard which every man has to his own character, and the overfinishing of the scene of falsehood, which has, and which ever will happen in every scene of falsehood, would have produced this account. We find this prediction appearing in its natural effect on the cunning and malicious minds of Christ's enemies. Attentive to every circumstance which might secure their triumph, they come to Pilate, saying, "Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again. Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night and steal him away, and say unto the people he is risen from the dead; so the last error shall be worse than the first. And they went and made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone, and setting a watch." This is one of those instances wherein artifice defeats its own purpose; for this security of the Pharisees and chief priests, is a proof to us, that the thing which they apprehended could not possibly happen.

2. The resurrection of Christ is ascertained by a competent number of witnesses. This plainly appears, from the concurring testimony of the four Evangelists, who agree in telling us, that he rose from the dead on the third day: and, as the highest evidence which such a matter of fact is capable of receiving, that he appeared to his apostles and disciples, not once, but on several occasions; and not in a manner which would give them a transient view of him, but in a way of the most familiar conversation. Thus he appeared to the women who came to visit the sepulchre, and comforted them; after this, to two of his disciples going to Emmaus, with whom he familiarly conversed, and expounded to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself. The same evening he appeared to ten of the apostles, Thomas only being absent; and, a week after, to all the eleven, when Thomas was present, whose doubting faith he condescended to confirm, by suffering him

him to handle his body ; " Reach hither thy finger," says he, " and behold my hands ; reach hither thy hand, and thrust into my side ; and be not faithless, but believing." Some time after, he showed himself to seven of the disciples at the sea of Tiberias, and not only talked with them, but did eat and drink, with some of the same circumstances which he had used before his crucifixion. And, not to mention his more private appearances, " he was seen," says the apostle Paul, " of above five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. After that, he was seen of James, then of all the apostles ; and last of all, he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time." In this manner he continued forty days, shewing himself alive after his passion, by many infallible proofs, and to many witnesses, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God ; and then at last, in the presence of all the apostles, he ascended visibly into heaven, and a cloud received him out of their sight. We have here a greater number of witnesses than what is necessary to establish any fact ; and all these declared, and constantly affirmed, that they saw Jesus alive again, and conversed with him after he was risen.

3. The witnesses of Christ's resurrection are in all respects worthy of credit. There is no reason to suspect them of being deceived, or of an intention to deceive. They were well acquainted with the person, the manners, and conversation of Christ ; and therefore it was impossible that any person, in the presence of his disciples, could assume his character. Their testimony receives farther credit, from their difficulty of belief. The thing appeared so extraordinary, that when the news was first brought them that Jesus was risen, they took it for an idle tale, and believed it not. The first time they saw him alive after his passion, they were afraid, and supposed they had seen a spirit. In a word, they did not hastily give credit to the report of his resurrection,

tion, but suspended their belief, till the evidence of its reality was so full and convincing, that it would have been weakness or folly to have continued longer in doubt.

But again, as they were not deceived themselves, so, considering their established character for uprightness and integrity, and the sufferings to which their testimony exposed them, we can have no good reason to believe them capable of imposing on others. Neither their fortune nor their reputation gained any addition from the deceit. They saw the leading men of the Jewish nation, the Roman government, and the general voice of the people, pursuing their Master even to the death. There was nothing but persecution, and ignominy and reproach, to be expected in his service. Except it had been the conviction of the truth, there was no motive to impel them to assert the resurrection; for, in no supposed condition of humanity, can suffering and ignominy, in their own nature, be a consolation to the persecuted and despised. In this instance, they gave the highest evidence of sincerity possible to be given: they ventured their lives for their testimony; they sealed it with their blood; and not one of them, by the cruellest tortures, or by the prospect of death, could be induced to withdraw his evidence from this important fact. The credibility of their testimony is farther supported by the different character which they assumed, as soon as they were fully convinced of the resurrection. You no longer behold the timid and spiritless disciples of a crucified and dead Master: You have no longer to trace them in the lurking places of Jerusalem, or in the shady retreats of the mountain of Olives. They appeared with the confidence of men, who were conscious that they spake what they saw and heard. "Let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ." And when the rulers had called Peter and John, and commanded them not to speak at

at all, nor teach in the name of Jesus; they answered and said to them, "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard."

4. The witnesses of the resurrection published this fact, at the very time, and in the very place where it happened, and freely submitted it to the strictest inquiry. Instead of being afraid of a discovery, as impostors generally are, they constantly appealed to the Jews, who, from the keenness of their malice, were much inclined, and who had it easily in their power, to disprove the resurrection, if it had been false. "Ye men of Israel, said the apostle Peter, standing up with the eleven, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you, by miracles, and wonders, and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know. Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain. Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death. This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. And the same day there were added to them about three thousand souls."

You see, then, on what sure and infallible grounds we build our faith in this important article. It is indeed a nail fastened in a sure place; and blessed be God it is so; for on this rests the whole weight of our faith and hope, and eternal happiness.

II. I am to lay before you the manner and circumstances of Christ's resurrection from the dead. And if we attend to the scriptures of truth, the only sure and unerring guide in this matter, we will find,

1. That he arose with awful majesty, becoming the Son of God, the Supreme Lord of heaven and earth. "For behold," says the evangelist, "there was a great earthquake, and an angel of the Lord
" de-

“descended from heaven, and rolled back the stone from the door of the sepulchre, and sat upon it.” At this awful moment, heaven as it were descended to earth, and nature trembled. The earthquake was a token of triumph and victory which our Saviour gave, not only to the Roman guards and the neighbouring city, but to the whole world, that he had overcome death in his own territories, and risen a conqueror over all his enemies. The appearance of the angel was splendid and glorious. His countenance shone like the brightness of lightning, and his raiment was white as snow. So awful indeed was the pomp and majesty of our Lord’s resurrection, that a visible effect was produced on those men who were accustomed to face danger in all its forms, and death itself in the field of battle; “The keepers trembled for fear, and became as dead men.”

2. His resurrection was effected by his own power. He was not awaked from the dead, as some have foolishly imagined, by any of those circumstances which were intended to give dignity to his resurrection. It was not the earthquake, nor the angel, that revived him in the sepulchre. He quickened and raised himself by the power of his own divinity: for as he voluntarily resigned his own life, so he had power to resume it at pleasure. “I lay down my life,” says he, “that I might take it again: I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again (a).” And the apostle Paul tells us, “That he was declared to be the Son of God with power, by his resurrection from the dead (b):” a plain proof, that he raised himself; for if he had been raised by the power of the Father alone, what more would have appeared in his resurrection, than in that of others who were raised by the same power? Or, how could his resurrection have been so powerful a demonstration that he was the Son of God?

3. His resurrection was accompanied with that of several of the departed faints. This remarkable circumstance

(a) John x. 17, 18.

(b) Rom. i. 4.

cumstance the evangelist Matthew expressly mentions. "The graves," says he, "were opened, and many bodies of the saints which slept, arose, and came out of their graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared to many (c)." It is not permitted to us to inquire minutely into the nature of this wonderful appearance of the saints, or what became of them afterwards. A veil of silence and secrecy is drawn over this transaction; and therefore, to search into it, as some have done, is a matter of vain and impertinent curiosity. It is sufficient for us to know, that they were designed as trophies of Christ's victory over death and the grave, as the first fruits of his power, and a blessed earnest of the future resurrection of the just. Hereby it was declared, that Jesus, by dying, had conquered death; and that, in virtue of his resurrection, all that sleep in him, should, in due time, be quickened and revived.

4. The resurrection of Christ was attended with the ministry of angels. An angel descended from heaven, and rolled away the stone from the door of the sepulchre; and two angels appeared to the women, after Christ was risen, to inform them what was become of their Lord, and to shew them the place where he lay. And indeed it deserves our particular notice, with what readiness and alacrity those blessed spirits ministered to our Saviour in his mean and humble state. They celebrated his birth in the most cheerful accents of praise; they ministered to him after his temptation; they strengthened him under his bitter agony; they watched his sacred body while it slept in death; and now they descended to grace the solemnity of his resurrection, and minister to him on so joyful an occasion. And easily may we believe that their heavenly minds would be filled with joy and delight when they were employed in this manner. At his first appearance in the world, when he, as it were, began the work of our redemption, the angels

(c) Matth. xxvii. 52, 53.

gels imparted the glad tidings to the shepherds with the greatest joy; and now, when he arose from the dead, having finished this glorious work, with what transports of joy would they publish the good news to the women, who came to mourn at their Saviour's grave? "Fear not ye; he is not here, he is risen."

5. He arose from the dead, invested with a public character, as the common head and representative of all his followers. "For now," says the apostle Paul, "is Christ risen, and become the first fruits of them that slept (*d*)."^(d) Not that he was the first that was raised from the dead; for the prophets had raised some, and he, during his ministry, had raised others: but the apostle alludes to the first fruits among the Jews, which were a pledge and an earnest of the future harvest. In like manner, the resurrection of Christ secures and sanctifies the resurrection of every believer. It is a blessed pledge and assurance of that general harvest at the end of the world, when the angels, as the reapers, shall gather the elect of God from the four winds. Hence, also, he is said to be the first born, and the first begotten from the dead, as being the first that arose to immortal life; and as, in virtue of his resurrection, the whole number of the redeemed are, in due time, to be born from the grave, and raised by him to immortal life. For, as the apostle reasons, "If we believe that Jesus died, and rose again, we may easily believe likewise, that them that sleep in Jesus will God bring with him (*e*)."^(e)

It now remains that I make a few plain reflections from this important truth, that Christ our Saviour is risen from the dead.

1. We may be instructed, from this subject, in the divinity of his nature, and in the excellency of his religion. His resurrection is a most effectual and convincing proof of his being the Son of God. What but Omnipotence can loose the bands of death, and

(*d*) 1 Cor. xv. 20.

(*e*) 1 Thess. iv. 14.

and rekindle the lamp of life after it is extinguished? Reason itself assures us, that if Christ had been a deceiver, an infinitely wise and holy God would never have given him this testimony of his approbation. Here, then, we have a solid foundation, on which to build our faith in Christ, and his gospel. Here we are furnished with a satisfying answer to all the objections of the ungodly. Christ is risen from the dead; and therefore, he most certainly came from God, and taught the mind of God in truth. Until the enemies of our religion have disproved this important fact, all their objections to it must be vain and unavailing; and so long as we are abundantly assured that he rose from the dead, our faith in Christ must remain firm and unshaken.

2. The sacrifice of Christ's death, is an atonement most acceptable and well-pleasing to God. His resurrection was a discharge or acquittal from the hand of divine justice; a public and authentic declaration, on the part of God, that he accepted the sacrifice of Christ's death as a complete atonement for the sins of his people. By discharging our Surety from the prison of the grave, he has given us the fullest assurance, that his justice is amply satisfied; for otherwise, the prisoner had never been released. The reproach of the cross is now ceased, and turned into glory. "There is now no condemnation to those that are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." God is just to forgive their sins. The price of their redemption is paid and accepted; and their Surety has obtained a full discharge. What reason, then, have we to triumph in the words of the apostle: "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died; yea, rather, that is risen again from the dead."

3. He is the appointed Judge of the world. "God," says the apostle, "hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness, by that man

“ whom he hath ordained ; whereof he hath given
“ assurance to all men, in that he hath raised him
“ from the dead (a).” What reason, then, have the
enemies of Christ to tremble ; you that are unbeliev-
ing impenitent sinners, that profane his sacred name ;
that pour contempt on his ordinances, and disregard
his laws ! For he will be revealed ere long in flam-
ing fire, to take vengeance on them that know him
not, and obey not his gospel. But let his friends re-
joice, even in the depth of sorrow, and in the dust
of death ; for he will come to be glorified in his
saints, and to put them in possession of those mansions
of perfect rest, and everlasting happiness, which he
is now preparing for them.

4. Let us consider the resurrection of Christ as a
powerful argument to encourage our trust in him,
and our hopes of eternal salvation by him. The
hopes to be derived from the resurrection, are full
of consolation to his servants. The pardon of all
your sins is now effectually secured to you ; for, as
he was delivered for your offences, so he rose again
for your justification. You may now hope for the
redemption of your bodies from the grave, and their
being transformed into the resemblance of his glori-
ous body ; for Christ is risen, and become the first
fruits of them that sleep. He is the first-born from
the dead, and you are the children of the resurrec-
tion. When, therefore, you part with your bodies
at death, you may lay them down in full hope of re-
ceiving them again, and of receiving them with infi-
nite advantage ; for he will change your vile bodies,
and make them perfect like his own. And when
that happy morning of the resurrection arrives, death
shall have no more dominion over you, but you shall
triumph over death and the grave : “ O death, where
“ is thy sting ? O grave, where is thy victory ?
“ Thanks be to God, who has given us the victory
“ through our Lord Jesus Christ.” And, finally,
you may now entertain the assured hope of a blessed
immortality ;

immortality ; “ for you are begotten again to a lively
“ hope, by the resurrection of Christ from the dead ;
“ to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and
“ that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you.”
Christ arose to die no more ; and his redeemed, in like
manner, shall rise to an immortal life, and be ever
with the Lord.

“ Wherefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast,
“ immoveable, always abounding in the work of the
“ Lord, for as much as ye know that your labour
“ shall not be in vain in the Lord.”

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SER.

SERMON II.

THE CIRCUMSTANCES AND BENEFITS OF CHRIST'S ASCENSION.

LUKE xxiv. 50, 51.

And he led them out as far as to Bethany, and he lift up his hands, and blessed them: And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven.

A Little before this period, we saw our Saviour nailed to the cross, and struggling with the powers of darkness and of death. Had the gospel history concluded here, it would have been mournful indeed; for, had he perished in the grave, all our hopes of salvation would have perished with him. But the words of the text bring us good tidings of great joy; viz. that after having risen from the dead, and continued for some time with his disciples, he ascended victorious and triumphant over all his own, and his peoples enemies. "And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven."

In the foregoing part of this chapter, we have the evidences of our Lord's resurrection, and his discourse to his disciples before his ascension.

The

The evidences of his resurrection, we mentioned and illustrated in the former discourse.

From the 44th verse, we have our Saviour's discourse to his disciples, before his ascension; in which, he explains to them, from the prophecies of the Old Testament, the necessity of his own death and resurrection. Like an affectionate parent, who is to leave his children on the world, he gives them suitable instructions concerning the design of their mission, and the doctrine they were to publish; and comforts them with the promise of the Spirit, to supply the wants of his bodily presence, to qualify them for their important work, and enable them to deliver their message with credit and success. In this manner, as this evangelist expresses it, "He showed himself alive to them after his passion, by many infallible proofs; being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God (a)."

One great object of our Saviour's mission was, to wean the affections of men from the things of this world, and to fix their attention on the happiness of a future and eternal state, which he died to procure. Our Saviour, during his whole ministry, in proportion as the prejudices of his disciples could bear it, was instructing them in the spiritual nature of his kingdom. But the period was now arrived, in which their minds would receive the most complete conviction of this important fact. His submission to death, his resurrection from the grave, and his ascension into heaven, were a combination of circumstances, plainly calculated to show them, that his kingdom was not of this world; and that, whither he was going, there, in due time, they would be also. To this evidence, during the forty days he continued on earth, he added particular instructions concerning the things that pertain to the kingdom of God. And when the time of his being glorified was at hand, "he led them out as far as to Bethany, and he lift up his hands and blessed

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"them.

(a) Acts i. 3.

“ them. And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven.”

In discoursing from these words, we propose, *First*, To illustrate the circumstances of our Lord's ascension, mentioned in the text. *Secondly*, We shall point out to you some of the ends and purposes for which he ascended. And, *Lastly*, Direct you to a suitable improvement.

I. We propose to illustrate the circumstances of our Lord's ascension, mentioned in the text. And,

1. We may attend to the place whence he ascended. It was from the neighbourhood of Bethany; I say, from the neighbourhood of Bethany, because it appears, that the particular place whence he ascended, was the famous Mount Olivet, on the skirt of which the village of Bethany stood. Thus we read in the Acts of the Apostles (*a*), that immediately after his ascension, the disciples returned to Jerusalem from the Mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a Sabbath-day's journey. This was the place whither our Saviour was accustomed to retire for meditation and prayer. In such situations, there is a solitude which ministers to devotion, and helps to elevate the mind to the contemplation of divine things. And probably, in this Mount Olivet, there was a convenient place for retirement from the world, where our Saviour had spent many delightful hours in communion with his Father. There, also, or near to it, probably at the foot of it, was the garden of Gethsemane, a place which he often frequented; where, a little before, he began his passion with an agony; where he was apprehended, and from whence he was led away to Jerusalem to be crucified. And, perhaps, he was pleased to honour this place with his ascension from it, to give his disciples a sensible demonstration of this great truth, that sufferings here, lead the way to glory hereafter; or, as the apostle

(*a*) Acts i. 12.

apostle expresses it, that "through much tribulation
" we enter into the kingdom of God."

2. To the witnesses of his ascension. His eleven apostles, and probably, also, his other disciples about Jerusalem, to the number of one hundred and twenty, were witnesses of this fact. Thus, we are told, (a) that when they were assembled together, and Christ among them, after his resurrection, and when he had given them in charge what he would have them to do, as they beheld, he was taken up; and in verse 10th it is said, they looked stedfastly toward heaven, as he went up. Hence he ascended in the view of his disciples, and while their eyes were attentively fixed on him. And this is as full and convincing a proof of the reality of our Lord's ascension as we could reasonably desire. The same persons who were witnesses of his resurrection, were also witnesses of his ascension: And their testimony is deserving of the highest credit, from the circumstances mentioned in the former discourse, which, it were improper here to repeat *.

3. We may attend to the work in which he was employed when he ascended:—It was in blessing his disciples. He lift up hands, and blessed them; and it came to pass, that while he blessed them, he was parted from them.

The lifting up of the hands was a ceremony used among the Jews in blessing the people. We are informed in one of the books of Moses (b), that Aaron, the high priest, lift up his hand towards the people, and blessed them. In like manner our Saviour, being now to leave this world, lifted up his hands in a solemn and devout manner, and blessed his disciples. This was the last action he performed on earth; an action prompted by love to them, and such as became him, who is the Prince of peace, and whose design in coming into the world was to seek and to save them that were lost. When his auspicious birth was proclaimed

(a) Acts i. 9.

* See Sermon on the Resurrection, p. 6,—9.

(b) Lev. ix. 22.

claimed to the shepherds, it was attended with praise to God, and with peace and good-will to men. His whole life was employed in acts of benevolence and love. When he died, he breathed out his soul in forgiveness to his enemies. And now, after his resurrection from the dead, when he was just leaving the world, he ascended to heaven with a blessing in his mouth; for it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven. The words which he employed on this occasion, are not recorded by the Evangelist; but they were doubtless very powerful and affecting, attended with that divine energy which would give the disciples a sense and feeling of the blessedness he pronounced on them. And, O what warm emotions of love and gratitude would then spring up in their hearts! With what exceeding delight and rapture would they be filled! When the two disciples reflected on the conversation they had with Christ going to Emmaus, they cried out, Did not our hearts burn within us, while he talked to us by the way, and opened to us the scriptures? Much more would the hearts of his disciples glow with holy affection, and exult with joy, while their Lord was pronouncing his parting blessing. Accordingly we find, in the verse following the text, "that they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy."

4. We may attend to the manner of his ascension;—he was carried up. To the same purpose, we are informed, in the Acts of the Apostles, that while his disciples beheld, he was taken up, and a cloud received him out of their sight (a). Not that our Saviour was merely passive, or stood in need of any assistance to accomplish his ascension; for nothing is more evident, than that he ascended, as he rose from the dead, by his own power. But the expression is probably designed to intimate, that though our Lord's ascension was his own voluntary act, yet, for the greater solemnity, he was attended by angels as he
went

(a) Acts i. 9.

went up into heaven. This, indeed, is hinted at in the two following verses of the same chapter: "And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven, as he went up, behold two men," that is, angels in the appearance of men, "stood by them in white apparel; which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? 'This same Jesus, which is taken from you into heaven, shall so come, in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.'" Hence the manner of his ascension was honourable and glorious. He returned to heaven as a triumphant conqueror, having obtained the most signal victory over all his own enemies, and those of his people. He made the cloud his chariot, and angels attended, to grace the triumph, and celebrate the Conqueror. And, O with what transports of joy, and songs of gladness, would they attend him in his glorious passage! "God is gone up with a shout; the Lord with the sound of a trumpet. Sing praises to God, sing praises: sing praises unto our King, sing praises (c)." And when he was arrived at his Father's court above, how would the whole city of God be moved at his coming? and with what joyful acclamations would he be welcomed home, again to take possession of the glory which he had with the Father before the world was?

Lastly, We may attend to the place whither he ascended;—He was carried up to heaven. The apostles saw him ascend gradually from the earth, till a cloud received him out of their sight; and two angels came and told them he was gone into heaven. He is elsewhere said to have ascended up far above all heavens (d); meaning, I suppose, that part of the heavens, which is at present visible to the inhabitants of this earth. Hence, the place whither our Lord ascended, was to the third heavens, the throne of God, and mansions of the blessed; to that place where he is now sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, and where all his redeemed shall be for ever with

(c) Psal. xlvii. 3.

(d) Eph. iv. 10.

with him. "For he is entered within the vail, that
 "is, into the most holy place, even into heaven
 "itself, there to appear in the presence of God for
 "us." And this brings me,

II. To point out some of the important ends and purposes for which Christ ascended into heaven.

1. He ascended, that he might receive the reward which was promised by the Father, for having undertaken and accomplished the work of our redemption. While he was on earth, he was obscure and unknown. Instead of giving him the honour due to his character and dignity, the princes and people of this world joined to affront and blaspheme him. He was reproached and buffeted, he was cruelly scourged, and at last put to a shameful death. But, the Son of God was not to be always the object of insult and derision to sinful men. There were honours in reserve for him, which were promised of the Father, and such as became his native perfections, and acquired merit. These, we find, he claims as a matter of agreement between him and the Father. "I have glorified thee on the earth; I have finished
 "the work which thou gavest me to do. And now,
 "O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self, with
 "the glory which I had with thee before the world
 "was (a)." He ascended then to receive this glory, as the due reward of his labours and sufferings. This is the express language of the apostle to the Philip-
 "pians: "Because he humbled himself, and became
 "obedient unto death, even the death of the cross,
 "wherefore God also hath highly exalted him (b)." But who can conceive, much less represent to you, that glory and dignity to which he is now advanced? It is infinitely superior to what eye hath seen, or ear heard: "For he hath a name given him above every
 "name; that, at the name of Jesus, every knee should
 "bow, of things in heaven, and things on earth,
 "and things under the earth; and that every tongue
 "should

(a) John xvii. 4, 5.

(b) Philip. ii. 8, 9.

"should confess that he is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." And in another place we find all the creatures joining together to exalt his name; saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain: Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and to the Lamb for ever and ever (a)."

2. He ascended, that he might send down the Holy Spirit, in his miraculous gifts, and sanctifying influences, on his church and people. This promise he himself gave to his disciples before his crucifixion. "Nevertheless, it is expedient for you that I go away; for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you: but, if I depart, I will send him unto you (b)." Accordingly, soon after his ascension, on the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was poured out in an extraordinary manner upon the apostles; whereby their minds were fully enlightened, and whereby they were furnished with all those gifts and graces which were necessary to qualify them for preaching the gospel to the world, and spreading it with credit and success. This was a gracious and important end of our Saviour's ascension. How inestimably precious were those gifts and graces of the Spirit, those noble donations, which he distributed on the day of his triumph? With what gratitude ought we to bless him, both for those distinguishing evidences of our religion at first, and for the continuance of those sacred influences of grace, by which our souls are quickened and renewed; by which they are sanctified and adorned; by which they are strengthened and comforted? "Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast received gifts for men, yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them. Blessed be the Lord, who daily loads us with benefits, even the God of our salvation."

3. He ascended, that he might make intercession for his people, appear in the presence of God for them,

(a) Rev. v. 12, 13.

(b) John xvi. 7.

them, and be their Advocate with the Father. Having, by his death and sufferings, purchased their deliverance from the guilt of sin, and by his doctrine and useful life, pointed out the way of recovery from the power of it; he did not then leave his work imperfect, nor abandon his gracious design: but, having risen from the dead, he ascended into heaven to plead their cause, to represent their wants, to offer up their requests to the Father, and to obtain for them all necessary blessings. "For Christ," says the apostle, "is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, there to appear in the presence of God for us (*k*)."

And O, my brethren, what obligations do we ly under to the blessed Saviour, for this end and purpose of his ascension? How comfortable is it, under all our sinful failings and lamented weaknesses, that we have an Advocate with the Father, even Jesus Christ the Righteous? What consolation is it under trials and temptations, that we have such a merciful and faithful High-priest, who has knowledge of our infirmities, and is able to succour them that are tempted? How encouraging is it to our prayers, that we have such a Friend in heaven, such a powerful and kind Mediator at the throne of grace? And how animating to the faithful servant of Christ, when called to combat with his spiritual enemies, that his Lord is pleading for him in heaven, and ever lives to make intercession for him?

4. He ascended, that he might take possession of heaven in the name of his followers, and prepare for them a place of eternal happiness. Christ, our elder brother, is gone before, to take possession of the heavenly inheritance. Hence he is represented in scripture as our forerunner. "Whither," that is, into heaven, "the Forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an High-priest for ever, after the order of Melchisedec." The life of the Christian is by faith, and not by sight; and therefore, it was not meet that

Christ

Christ should continue to be the visible Captain of our salvation on earth; but we have reason to rejoice in the words of consolation which he administered to his disciples, when they were afflicted with the prospect of his departure, "In my Father's house," "are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you: I go to prepare a place for you (a)." How infinitely, then, are we indebted to Jesus Christ! What endearing obligations ly upon us to love and honour him, who not only purchased heaven for us by his death, but who has gone before to prepare it for our reception!

Lastly. He ascended, that he might secure to his followers their admission into heaven after him. In the mean time, having all power in heaven and in earth committed to him, he reigns above as the guardian of their title to an incorruptible inheritance. And he has graciously promised, that he will come again and receive them to the full possession of it. "And if I go away," says he, "and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to myself, that where I am, there you may be also (b)." Hence, the Christian's future ascension into heaven, is as certain as that of his Lord and Master. He will come again at the end of the world, and raise their bodies from the grave; and, having fashioned them like to his own glorious body, he will translate them in a triumphant manner into heaven; and there they shall be ever with the Lord.

It now remains that I direct your attention to some suitable improvement of this subject.

1. If Christ our Lord and Saviour be ascended into heaven, it becomes us to follow him frequently thither with our thoughts and meditations. Let our minds be directed to the contemplation of what he is in himself, of what he has done and suffered for us, and of what he is still doing, now that he is passed into the heavens, and far exalted above every name.

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(a) John xiv. 2.

(b) John xiv. 3.

Let us particularly meditate on that glory and happiness to which he is now advanced as the reward of his sufferings. He who was wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities, is now made glad at his Father's right hand, in the full possession of eternal joy : He that was despised and insulted by men, is now adored and worshipped by angels : He whose head was pierced with a crown of thorns, is now adorned with a crown of glory : He who was exposed to the ridicule of his enemies on the cross, sits enthroned in the highest majesty, and all his enemies shall be made his footstool. Let us frequently indulge in such meditations as those. And surely, none can be more worthy of our serious attention, or more agreeable to the mind of a Christian.

2. Let the consideration of our Lord's ascension engage us to adore and worship him. This effect we find it produced on the disciples, in the verse following the text. When they saw him ascending, they worshipped him. Religious worship and adoration is due to him both from angels and men. Thus, the apostle to the Hebrews ; " When he," that is, the Father, " bringeth in the First-begotten into the world, " he saith, Let all the angels of God worship him (a)." And, if those glorious and exalted spirits who surround the throne of God, and minister continually in his presence, prostrate themselves before the Lamb, and pay their homage to him ; much more ought we, who are creatures of a lower rank, and who ly under infinitely greater obligations to him. Let us then entertain the most exalted thoughts of our ascended Saviour ; let us worship him with the highest acts of homage ; and, while we view him by faith ascended into heaven, let us lift up our souls to him in the most fervent devotion.

3. We have much reason to rejoice in the thoughts of our Lord's ascension into heaven, and exaltation at the right hand of God. This effect we find his ascension also to have produced on the minds of his disciples.

(a) Heb. i. 6.

disciples. When they worshipped him, they returned to Jerusalem with great joy. And no wonder; for this last appearance of our Saviour was the highest testimony to his character, and the seal of his promises. How would it animate their zeal, and enliven their hopes, when they called to mind what he had said to them before his crucifixion! "Ye cannot follow me now, but ye shall follow me afterwards; and where I am, there shall my servant be." With the same joy ought our hearts to be filled, when we reflect on his ascension and exaltation. When he came into the world, he began the work of our redemption. Hence, his birth was published to the shepherds, as matter of great joy; but when he ascended, it was to finish and complete that glorious work, and, of consequence, to lay the most solid foundation for our faith, and hope, and comfort. "Who then shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died: yea, rather, that is risen again; who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us."

4. From this subject, the people of God may derive the greatest relief and consolation under all their distresses and fears. It is encouraging to his servants to know that their Redeemer is still alive, and lives for evermore; that all power in heaven and earth is committed to him; and that he is able to make all things work together for their good. When he ascended on high, he led captivity captive; he triumphed over all his people's enemies: hence, except by his permission, they can never assault his servants; and even Satan, their grand adversary, shall, in a short time, be bruised under their feet. How comfortable is it, then, my brethren, to reflect, that, in every temptation and state of trial, he can make his grace sufficient for you, or give a way to escape? In darkness, he can give you light; and in the valley and shadow of death, he is the resurrection and the life,

and from on high can breathe on your dry bones, and make them to live. In a word, this Friend and Saviour on high, makes apprehension of danger, or discouragement under trial, without reason; for he will never leave nor forsake you, till he has perfected what concerns you, and made you glorious and happy for ever.

5. Let the consideration of Christ's ascension into heaven, inspire us with humble boldness, and make us zealous and fervent in our applications to the throne of grace. In this manner, the apostle to the Hebrews improves this fact: "Seeing, then, we have
 " a great High Priest that is passed into the heavens,
 " Jesus the Son of God; let us come boldly to the
 " throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and
 " find grace to help in the time of need (a)." Our approaches to the throne of grace should be frequent, in proportion to the necessity and importance of the ends of prayer. We daily need mercy for pardon, and grace for supplying our various wants. But the consciousness of our own numberless defects and failings, is apt to mar our confidence, and prevent our prayers. In those circumstances, how comfortable and enlivening is the thought, That, if any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father; that Jesus our Redeemer stands before his throne; that he pleads our cause; and that Him the Father heareth always.
 " Having, therefore, brethren, boldness to enter in-
 " to the holiest, by the blood of Jesus, by a new and
 " living way, which he hath consecrated for us
 " through the vail, that is to say his flesh; and hav-
 " ing an High Priest over the house of God, let us
 " draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of
 " faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil con-
 " science, and our bodies washed as with pure wa-
 " ter."

6. As our Saviour is ascended into heaven, let us follow him thither with our hearts and affections.

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(a) Heb. iv. 14,—16.

This improvement the apostle Paul also directs us to make of the ascension of Christ. "If ye then," says he, "be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God: set your affections on things above, not on things on earth." Your Saviour and Master is in heaven, and should not your hearts be there also? The Captain of your salvation is entered within the gates of the New Jerusalem: He invites you to follow him, and proposes the most glorious rewards for your encouragement: "To him that overcometh," says he, "will I grant to sit with me on my throne, as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father on his throne." Let us then, my brethren, lift up our hearts and affections to that place whither he is gone. Let us be much in heaven in our thoughts and desires, and cultivate all holy and heavenly dispositions. In a word, it becomes us, as the apostle expresses it, "to have our conversation in heaven, where our Saviour is, and from whence also we look for him again, to change our vile bodies, that they may be fashioned like to his glorious body, according to the working of that mighty power whereby he is able to subdue all things to himself (a)."

Lastly. Let us frequently look, and wait for his second coming. The heavens indeed must receive him, till the times of the restitution of all things; but then he will appear the second time, without sin, to the final and complete salvation of his people. "If I go away," says he, "and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to myself." His second coming, though similar in some respects to his ascension, will be inconceivably more solemn, public, and glorious. For he will come again in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory. He ascended in the sight of his disciples only; but he will come again in the view of the whole assembled world: "For behold he cometh with clouds, and

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“every eye shall see him.” Let us then frequently represent to our minds this glorious appearance of the great God and our Saviour: Let us look and wait for it, as the day of complete redemption, when he will come to vindicate his honour, and display his glory.

Amen: even so, come, Lord Jesus: come quickly.

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SERMON III.

THE BLESSINGS OF CHRIST'S PURCHASE SUFFICIENT FOR SUPPORT AND HAPPINESS.

ISAIAH XXV. 6.

And in this mountain shall the Lord of Hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined.

THESE words, in the opinion of some commentators, refer to the great joy that should be in Zion or Jerusalem, upon the miraculous overthrow of the Assyrian army, in the reign of Hezekiah; or to the rejoicing of the Jews, when they should be delivered from the captivity of Babylon. And this perhaps is the primary and more immediate design of the prophecy. But it may be also understood in a more sublime and exalted sense, as referring to the blessings of the kingdom of Christ, and the happiness which was to be enjoyed by the faithful under his administration. Considering the text in this point of view, it is a figurative, but beautiful description of that rich provision of grace, which is made for the entertainment of the faithful in the gospel covenant, and which was procured for them by the appearance
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and mediation of Jesus Christ. This is frequently represented in scripture under the similitude of a feast. The metaphor is natural and expressive, and may very properly be applied to the solemn ordinance of the Lord's Supper, of which you have so near a prospect; for here, all the invaluable blessings of the gospel, as purchased by the blood of Christ, are in a manner provided and brought forth for our entertainment; so that I may now say, as our Saviour did on another occasion, "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears;" and with the apostle Paul, in his sermon at Antioch, "I declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same to us their children."—"For in this mountain hath the Lord of Hosts made unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined."

By the mountain here, where this feast is provided, we are plainly to understand the gospel-church; of which Mount Zion, with the Jewish temple erected upon it, was an eminent type. There hath the Lord of Hosts made unto all people, to persons of all ranks and degrees, of every station and character in life, to the faithful in all nations, the Gentiles as well as the Jews, a feast of fat things, and full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined. The figures which are here employed, are bold and lively. Fat and marrow, wines that have stood a competent time on the lees, and then well refined; plainly intimating, that there is abundance and variety, not only of spiritual food and nourishment, but even of delicacies, provided in the gospel for the entertainment of believers. The table is richly spread and furnished with the choicest delights; for, as the apostle expresses it, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him (a)."

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In discoursing farther on this subject, I shall endeavour, by divine assistance, to consider, *First*, the Author and Master of this spiritual feast; *Secondly*, the nature of it, in some of its excellent and distinguishing characters; *Thirdly*, the entertainment provided in it for the guests; and, *Lastly*, conclude with a short application.

I. I begin, by briefly pointing out to you, the Author and Master of this spiritual feast. And here, indeed, its excellence will chiefly appear; for the Lord of Hosts himself hath made it. The infinitely glorious and exalted Jehovah, the Sovereign Majesty of heaven and earth, designed and prepared it in the eternal counsels of his will; he gave his only begotten Son to purchase it, and the Holy Ghost to reveal and apply it to every sincere believer.

1. God the Father, the Sovereign Majesty of heaven and earth, designed and prepared this spiritual feast in the eternal counsels of his will. "Blessed" says the apostle to the Ephesians, "be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ; according as he has chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, to the praise of the glory of his grace (g)." God the Father is then the author and giver of this feast. He provided it from all eternity, in order to display the riches of his grace, and make his chosen people holy and happy. We have heard of sumptuous and splendid feasts, of which, the preparation and arrangement had required much industry and art. But here is such a feast, as the united wisdom of angels and men could never have contrived; a feast of such excellence and value, as was worthy of infinite wisdom and goodness to give; but which, before it was bestowed, man could not have conceived, and far less expected.

2. As God the Father designed and prepared this spiritual feast for the entertainment of his chosen people,

people, so he gave his only begotten Son to purchase it, by his obedience and sufferings in their room and stead. "For," says the apostle, "when the fulness of time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons (a)." Nor did the Son of God, at whatever expence it might be procured, decline to make the purchase. He left the bosom of the Father, and all the glories of heaven. He appeared in the form of a servant, and made himself of no reputation. He led a poor, despised, and sorrowful life; and at last, shed his own precious blood, that he might do his Father's will, and procure for his people all the blessings of the covenant. Accordingly, we find, that he is represented in the Proverbs of Solomon (b), under the notion of wisdom, as having purchased and provided this spiritual feast: "Wisdom hath built her house, she hath mingled her wine, she hath also furnished her table:" and as sending forth her servants to invite us to accept of the entertainment, "Come," says she, "eat of my bread, and drink of the wine that I have mingled."

Lastly, The Holy Spirit is also given to reveal and apply the designed and purchased benefits to every sincere believer. He is now at hand to take of the things of Christ, and shew them unto us. He gives the spiritual appetite, and enables the Christian to feed by faith on a crucified Redeemer, and the purchase of his blood. I will add, that the new covenant of God's grace is now fully established by the death of Christ, as a divine charter, in which the Almighty consigns over all those purchased benefits to every one that believes, or that comes to him through a Redeemer. All things are therefore now ready. How justly, then, may He, who is the Lord of Hosts, be styled the Maker and Master of this feast?

II.

(a) Gal. iv. 4, 5.

(b) Prov. ix.

II. But I now proceed, *Secondly*, To open up the nature of it, in some of its excellent and distinguishing characters. And,

1. It is a spiritual feast. Though it be described in Scripture, by emblems that relate to objects of sense, we are not to imagine, that there is any thing sensual in it, or adapted to the bodily taste: no, every thing here is pure and spiritual; the food and entertainment of those whose minds have been savingly enlightened to discern the things that are spiritual. Our Saviour, speaking of himself, and the benefits he has purchased, says, "This is the bread" which came down from heaven, that a man may "eat thereof and not die (c)." And as it is of a spiritual nature, and heavenly origin; so, the design and tendency of it, is to raise our souls to heaven, and improve their relish for the enjoyments of that blessed world. In a word, it is the same in kind with that celestial feast, that pure river of the water of life, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb, which the inhabitants of heaven, the spirits of just men made perfect, shall for ever enjoy. It differs from it only in degree; for communion with God in this world, is a dawn of heaven, and the foretaste of eternal happiness.

2. It is a feast upon a sacrifice. Under the law, after part of the sacrifice was consumed upon the altar, the priest, and they for whom it was offered, were allowed to feast upon that which remained. But here is a feast upon an infinitely greater and more excellent sacrifice, the great propitiatory sacrifice of the blood of Christ, which made full and complete atonement for sin, satisfied the demands of impartial justice, and brought in everlasting redemption; a sacrifice, which, when offered, our High Priest could say, "It is finished;" a sacrifice, in a word, most acceptable and well-pleasing to God, which can purge the conscience from dead works, and fit us for the service and worship of him who is

a Spirit, in spirit and in truth. To feast on such a sacrifice, must therefore be a delightful and refreshing entertainment to the soul of the believer. "He," says our Saviour, "that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day; for my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed." But, further, it is likewise a feast upon a sacrifice; as, in it, believers, who are made priests unto God for that end, offer up the spiritual sacrifices of prayer and praise, and other acts of devotion; being assured, that they shall be accepted in the Beloved. Nay, they are, as the apostle exhorts them, to offer up themselves a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is their reasonable service (*d*). And this leads me to observe,

3. That it is also a feast upon a covenant. In the Old Testament we read, that as feasts were made upon a sacrifice, so they frequently covenanted together at feasts. We meet with a remarkable instance of this in Gen. xxxi., where Jacob and Laban ratified their covenant of friendship, not only by offering sacrifice, but by feasting together: and under the New Testament, the apostle speaks of the communion of the body and blood of Christ, as corresponding to the eating of the sacrifice. Upon seating ourselves at the table of the Lord, and partaking of the sacred symbols, we declare our acceptance of the gospel-covenant, that we take the Lord for our God, and devote ourselves to his service: and, certainly, the obligations which we then come under, excel every other tie, as much as the sacrifice of Christ excels the sacrifices of the Jews; or the spiritual eating and drinking of his body and blood, the partaking of the ancient sacrifices at the altar. In a word, by our eating and drinking at the table of the Lord, we take a solemn oath, that we will be true and faithful to him; and if we are sincere in this covenant-engagement, he graciously promises, that he will be
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our God. For such we find to be the tenor of the covenant: "I will be their God, and they shall be my people (e)." And, as I formerly observed, this covenant is unalterably confirmed, by the shedding of Christ's blood; so that every believer may now triumph in the reasoning of the apostle,—He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, and who gives us his broken body and shed blood to feast upon, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?

4. It is also a feast of love. The Jewish passover, which was an eminent type of it, was a feast of love as well as of remembrance; for it was celebrated by the whole nation of the Jews, assembled together in one place; plainly intimating, that they were one body united together in love. But the Lord's Supper is much more a feast of love; for it is a memorial of the unexampled and astonishing love, which the Son of God expressed in laying down his life for us; and surely, on our parts, it ought to be kept with the warmest gratitude and affection. Our hearts should burn with love to him, who loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood. But besides this, it is also a feast of love, as it is most significant of that Christian charity and love which the guests should bear to one another; for they all sit at one table, and eat of the same bread, and drink of the same cup. Nay, by this solemn action, they declare their love to each other, as children of the same divine family, and members of one mystical body, of which Christ is the Head; and therefore they ought to be united together in the tenderest bond of sympathy and affection. Happy are they who abound in this grace. The God of love and peace shall be with them.

5. And, *lastly*, It is a plentiful feast, and freely given; the provision of a God, who delights to exercise loving-kindness in the earth, and will supply all the wants of his people, according to his riches in glory

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by Christ Jesus. There is bread enough in your Father's house, and to spare; enough to answer every exigence, to satisfy every desire, and to fill up every capacity of enjoyment: for it hath pleased the Father, that in Christ should all fulness dwell, and out of his fulness you may all receive, and grace for grace. If then you will come with enlarged hearts, hungering and thirsting after Christ, you shall be abundantly satisfied with the goodness of his house, even of his holy temple. And finally, This spiritual feast, as it is full and satisfying, so it is freely given. How ample and generous is the invitation to it? "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money, come, buy wine and milk, without money and without price. Whosoever will, let him come, and take of the water of life freely." Though it was dearly purchased by your Saviour, yet he offers it to you in the kindest and most encouraging manner: "Behold," says he, "I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him and he with me."

III. And this brings me to consider, *thirdly*, The entertainment provided in it, or on what communicants are invited to feast at the table of the Lord.

In general, then, they are to feast on a crucified Redeemer, his broken body, and his shed blood. Now, the sufferings of Christ, when contemplated by faith, afford the most delightful entertainment to a believer.—For,

1. He sees, in them, that divine justice is fully satisfied, and provision made for his pardon and justification. "In Christ," says the apostle, "we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sin." Nay, divine justice itself is concerned, upon the account of Christ's death, to pardon the iniquities of his servants. "If," says the apostle John, "we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins;" just, not indeed with regard

gard to us, for his grace is unmerited and free ; but just, with regard to the death of Christ : for he having paid the debt, the discharge must in justice follow. Now, what a feast is this to a convinced and humble soul ? Son, be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee. What a refreshing cordial is this ? What joy must spring up in the mind, when the sweetness of pardoning mercy is infused into our cup of consolation ? “ Blessed is he,” says the Psalmist, “ whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered : “ Blessed is the man to whom the Lord imputeth not “ iniquity.”

2. Another fruit of the sufferings and death of Christ, that we are here invited to feast upon, is peace with God ; for this inseparably accompanies the former. “ Being justified by faith,” says the apostle, “ we have peace with God through our “ Lord Jesus Christ.” And what a blessed privilege is this ! how divinely sweet and ravishing to the soul ! To be reconciled to God, who is the best of friends, and whose favour is better than life ; and not only to be reconciled, but to be assured of his favour, of his dearest and tenderest love : What more canst thou desire ? What greater comfort, what more satisfying joy, than to be able to say with the Psalmist, “ This God is my God for ever and ever, and “ he will be my guide even unto death ?” “ Yea, “ though I walk through the valley and shadow of “ death, he will be with me ; his rod and his staff “ will comfort me.”

3. From thence, as another part of your entertainment, there results peace and tranquillity of conscience. This is one of those precious legacies which Christ bequeathed to his disciples when he was leaving the world : “ Peace,” says he, “ I leave with “ you, my peace I give unto you.” This peace is such as the world can neither give nor take away ; for it arises from a sense of our reconciliation to God, and the assurance of an interest in his love. But what this is, how pleasing and delightful to the

soul, is better felt than it can be expressed. Peace in the conscience is a cordial inexpressibly delightful. When the peace of God is shed abroad in the heart, the pleasure of it passeth understanding. In a word, it is the bread and the water of life; it exalts the soul to a taste of celestial enjoyment, and confers a sense of internal security, which the wicked cannot feel. And hence, says the Psalmist, when reflecting on the goodness of God in granting him this peace, "Return unto thy rest, O my soul, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee."

4. Another fruit of Christ's death and sufferings, on which believers are invited to feast, is communion and fellowship with God. There is nothing that has a greater tendency to sweeten human life, than the intercourse of one friend with another. What then can be imagined more pleasing to the soul, than the friendship of God, and communion with him? Now, this also is provided as a part of the devout communicant's entertainment at the table of the Lord; for there he is admitted to see the King in his beauty, and the land that is afar off. He tastes that the Lord is gracious, and feels his love shed abroad in his heart; and he can therefore say with the Church, "I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste. He brought me into the banqueting-house, and his banner over me was love." Nay, such is the happiness which the people of God sometimes experience in communion with him at his table, that they are made to say with the disciples on the mount, "Lord, it is good for us to be here:" and as Jacob did of Bethel, "Surely the Lord is in this place; this is none other but the house of God, this is the gate of heaven." And indeed, my brethren, when the soul is favoured with such near and intimate communion as this, it enjoys a kind of heaven upon earth; it tastes the food of angels, and receives as it were the first fruits, in the joyful hope of reaping the full harvest.

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These then are a few of the rich and invaluable blessings purchased by the death of Christ, and which are provided for your entertainment, who are sincere and faithful communicants.

But again, you are likewise to feast upon his death, as it is the new testament in his blood, *i. e.* a ratification of the new testament or covenant, by this sacred symbol,—the shedding of his blood. Thus, we find, the apostle to the Hebrews represents the death of Christ, in allusion to a testamentary disposition or settlement, which of necessity requires the death of the testator (*a*). Hence, the precious fruits of the death of Christ, and all the blessings which he has bequeathed to the heirs of promise, are by this means unalterably confirmed and secured to them; and in scripture they are called the sure mercies of David: nay, all the promises are said to be in him, Yea, and in him, Amen, to the glory of God.

Many other views of our Redeemer's death might have been given you, as a suitable and pleasing entertainment at a communion table. I might have observed to you, that, by his death and sufferings, he is made a perfect Captain of salvation, and a most compassionate and merciful High-priest; for in that he himself suffered, being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted. I might have observed farther, that, by his death and sufferings, he merited his triumphant entrance into the highest heavens, and that, not only in his own name, but to take possession of the heavenly glory, as our Head and Forerunner. And, finally, that, in virtue of his blood shed upon the cross, he makes effectual and never-ceasing intercession at his Father's right hand. But on these, the limits of this discourse will not allow me to insist.

I only add, that believers in Christ are called to feast upon his death, because, by this one offering, he hath for ever perfected them that are sanctified; and as he has purchased all that is necessary to make you perfect, so he is invested with full power and au-

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thority to bestow it upon you. Nay, it is treasured up in him as your Head of influences, and shall be communicated to you in such a manner as he shall see fit. In a word, he will carry you on gradually to perfection, and at last make you perfect in holiness, that you may be ever with the Lord.

You see then what you have to feast upon; and I appeal to yourselves, if it be not a feast of fat things, and full of marrow, of wines upon the lees, and well refined.

And now, have you not the highest reason to admire the wonderful condescension and grace of our Redeemer? Art thou not now saying, "Whence is this to me? What am I, or what is my Father's house, that thou hast brought me hitherto?" Shall the only begotten of the Eternal Jehovah not only lay down his life for me, but give me his flesh and blood, his death and sufferings, to feast upon? Strange, mysterious love! it infinitely transcends my utmost conception; and all I can do, is to cry out with the apostle, "O, the height and depth, the breadth and length, of the love of Christ! It passeth knowledge."

But is there such a feast as this provided for your entertainment? I address you in the words of the prophet Isaiah, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk, without money, and without price." Consider who invites you; it is your Saviour, and best friend; he that has loved you, and given his soul a ransom for you; he that is now remembering you at the right hand of the throne of God his Father, and from whose lips your final sentence must proceed. Consider what a noble feast he invites you to; a feast, as you have heard, of fat things full of marrow, and of wines on the lees well refined, even all the blessings of the new and well-ordered covenant, as purchased by the shedding of his own precious blood, and unalterably secured, and ready for your acceptance. And is it possible you can slight and despise his invitation?

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How may the angels of heaven, think ye, be astonished at this? And what fullen pleasure will it afford the apostate angels to see the Lord of Glory, who made no atonement for them, slighted, in the offers of his love, by the children of men? Can you be such enemies to your own interest, as to refuse his offer? Where can you meet with such another? and how can you possibly escape, if you neglect it? But happy, indeed, unspeakably happy, will you be, if you accept of it, and resign yourselves to him, in a perpetual covenant never to be forgotten.—Finally, Consider that this is, perhaps, the last time that such a call and invitation shall be addressed to you. Many such calls have been given you, and you who are unbelieving and impenitent have slighted them all; and God is now perhaps taking his final leave of some of you; for his Spirit will not always strive with man. While therefore it is called to-day, hear his voice, and harden not your hearts; lest you provoke him to swear in his wrath, that ye shall never enter into his rest.

But I hope there are some here who are hungering and thirsting after Christ, and a share in the blessings of his purchase; nay, who have already tasted this heavenly food, and whose spiritual appetite is by that means enlarged: such I invite to the table of the Lord. All things are ready on his part; and his call to you is, Eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly. Study then to have all things ready on your's. Come in the lively exercise of every grace, particularly of faith and love. Awake, awake; put on thy strength, O Zion, put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, and come in the strength of the Lord your God, making mention of his righteousness, even of his only. The Spirit and the Bride say, Come; and let him that is athirst come, and whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely.

SERMON IV.

THE INVITATION TO THE BLESSINGS OF CHRIST'S PURCHASE CONSIDERED.

ISAIAH lv. 1.

Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk, without money, and without price.

THESE words are a most ample and gracious invitation to sinners of mankind to come and partake of the blessings of the gospel. The language is figurative; and the apostle Paul furnishes us with a key to open up its meaning: for, in Acts xiii. 33, 34. he speaks of the sure mercies of David, which, in the third verse of this chapter, are said to be the sum of the everlasting covenant that God will make with believers, as flowing from the resurrection of Christ; *i. e.* having purchased these blessings by his death, he is now, in consequence of his resurrection, invested with power and authority to bestow them. Here, then, the unfearchable riches of grace are displayed; the greatest, the most excellent and lasting blessings are freely offered, and you are kindly invited to come and partake of them. “Ho, every
“ one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he
“ that

“ that hath no money ; come ye, buy and eat ; yea,
“ come, buy wine and milk, without money, and
“ without price.”

In discoursing on these words, I shall endeavour, by divine assistance, to show you, *first*, Who are invited, and the qualification of those that will be made welcome ; “ Ho, every one that thirsteth.” *Secondly*, What they are invited to partake of,—waters, wine, and milk. *Thirdly*, How we are to partake of the blessings that are offered to us ;—we are to come, buy and eat, without money, and without price. And then conclude, by a short practical improvement of the subject.

I. I begin with shewing you, who are invited, and the qualification of those, that will be made welcome to partake of the unsearchable riches of grace : “ Ho, every one that thirsteth.”

The call of the gospel is, indeed, addressed to all, without distinction ; not to the Jews only, to whom the word of salvation was first sent, but to the Gentiles also, who, for many ages, were without Christ in the world ; aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise : Nor is it confined to one nation or family, to one tribe or kindred of mankind ; but extends to all nations, tribes, and kindreds, wherever the gospel is preached. Ye Gentiles, that are amongst the outmost isles of the nations, to you this day is the invitation given. “ Look unto me,” says Christ, “ and be ye saved, “ all the ends of the earth.” He came to seek and to save that which was lost ; to save even the chief of sinners. In him there is enough for all ; and such as come to him, he will in nowise cast out. So that all who live under the gospel, are invited and encouraged to come ; and it is no presumption in any, to hope for a kind and gracious reception. “ Behold,” says our merciful Redeemer, “ I stand at “ the door and knock ; if any man hear my voice, “ and open the door, I will come in to him, and
“ will

“will sup with him, and he with me.” In a word, the gospel-covenant excludes none that do not exclude themselves, by having no desire or inclination to partake of the blessings promised in it.

And this brings me to show you, what qualifications those must be possessed of, whom Christ will make welcome to these rich and precious blessings. It is here, as in other parts of Scripture, expressed by thirsting:—Ho, every one that thirsteth. “If any man thirst,” says our Saviour, “let him come unto me and drink.”—“Let him that is athirst come, and whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely.” The import of this thirsting, in general, is a strong and ardent desire after heavenly and spiritual blessings. But seeing God is pleased, in condescension to our weak capacities, to represent the desires of the soul, by the sensations or appetites of the body, let us consider what this thirsting supposes and implies.

1. It supposes a deep sense and conviction in the soul, of its need of Christ, and salvation through him. A man must be persuaded that he is a sinner, a guilty and perishing sinner, before he can in earnest thirst for the Saviour. Our blessed Lord tells us, that the whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. He that does not see himself condemned, will not sue for a pardon. It is the wounded spirit that seeks after healing. We fly for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before us; because we see ourselves in danger of death, from the avenger of blood that pursues us. Christ is lifted up in the gospel, and presented in the promise, for the wretched and undone to confide in for life and salvation: but the impenitent sinner does not see his need of him, and has therefore no desire of applying to him for those blessings. So long as ye are full of this world, and think yourselves, with the church of Laodicea, rich, increased in goods, and to have need of nothing, you will not, you cannot thirst after Christ, as an invaluable treasure. So long as ye fancy yourselves whole,
and

and of a sound constitution, you will not desire him as a Sovereign Physician. In a word, the soul, in thirsting for Christ, looks on itself as a poor, needy, fatherless, friendless creature, and stays itself on sovereign grace and mercy.

2. This thirsting supposes also a knowledge and conviction in the soul, that, while every created object is insufficient to supply its wants, there is sufficient fulness in Christ for its salvation and happiness. It supposes that the soul finds nothing in the enjoyments of time that can be a portion to it; nothing in the pleasures of sin that can satisfy it; and nothing in its own righteousness that it can build upon as a foundation for acceptance with God and eternal life; but that which it sought after in other objects in vain, is to be found in Christ; a perfect righteousness to cover all its deformities; a fulness of grace to supply its wants; every thing, in a word, that can make it happy in time, and through eternity: for it hath pleased the Father, that in him should all fulness dwell. And, finally, as he is an all-sufficient and suitable, so also he is a most willing Saviour; who, as he came into the world to seek and save them that were lost, and cheerfully underwent the lowest abasement and most painful sufferings, that he might purchase their redemption, so, he still stands with outstretched arms, ready to embrace the returning sinner; and expressly declares, that him that cometh unto Him, he will in nowise cast out.

3. This thirsting implies a strong and ardent desire in the soul after Christ, and the blessings of his purchase, that it may get an interest in him, conformity to him in holiness, and communion with him. While many are saying, Who will shew us any good, any worldly, temporal, sensual good? the language of the thirsting soul is, I intreat thy favour with my whole heart. Lord, lift on me the light of thy countenance. Let me but have Christ for my portion, and I have enough; I need no more. Without him, indeed, the whole creation is nothing to me; but,
even

even in the want of all things, I should think him every thing. This is indeed to thirst for Christ, and the blessings he has purchased. Here is a soul that follows hard after him, and exclaims, "O, when wilt thou come unto me?" Such were the devout breathings of David, when compelled to reside at a distance from the sanctuary of God. "As the hart," says he, "panteth after the water brooks; so panteth my soul after thee, O God; my soul thirsteth for God, the living God. When shall I come and appear before God (a)?"—"My soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is, to see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary (b)."

This, then, is the qualification of all those whom Christ will make welcome. Commune with your own hearts. Do you find any such thirst within you? Call in the aid and assistance of God's Spirit, and say, "Search me, O Lord, and try me;" and if, upon impartial search, you can say that it is so with you, then, O thirsty soul, I, in the name of God, invite thee to come to the waters. And this brings me,

II. To shew you what you are invited to come to, to buy, and to eat;—waters, wine, and milk.

By these, we are to understand, in general, the promised blessings of the new covenant, which Christ, having purchased by his death, is invested with full power and authority to bestow upon all thirsty souls. I am unwilling to pursue the metaphors too far, but shall endeavour to keep them in view while describing those spiritual blessings. And indeed there is a peculiar beauty and fitness in them to represent to us the abundant fulness, the rich variety of the benefits of Christ's purchase, and their perfect suitability to all that we can want or desire, to make us happy.

I. As

(a) Psal. xlii. 1, 2.

(b) Psal. lxxiii.

1. As water is refreshing to the thirsty, so they, whom Christ will make welcome, being called thirsty, it was extremely proper to express by water their entertainment on their coming to him. There is then in Christ Jesus that which will satisfy your most enlarged and ardent desires. Are ye thirsty for the pardon and forgiveness of sin, your souls being, as it were, parched with the terrors of the law? Here then are the cooling waters of mercy; a full, a free, and final pardon. The blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin, and he is exalted a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance and remission of sin to Israel. Are ye thirsty for communion and fellowship with God, that you may be brought nigh to him, and see his power and glory? When he hides his face, are ye in a dry and thirsty land, wherein no water is? Through Christ ye shall have access to your heavenly Father, by that new and living way, which he hath consecrated through the vail of his flesh, *i. e.* by faith in his death and sufferings.

And as the blessings of the new covenant are refreshing, so also they are healing waters. They are like the waters of the pool of Bethesda, into which, whoever stept when the angel descended and troubled it, was cured of his peculiar disease. Here, then, O believer, is a sovereign remedy for all the spiritual maladies under which thou labourest. What are these maladies? Hardness of heart, wandering of mind, deadness of affection, prevailing lusts and weakness of faith? In these waters of the sanctuary there is a cure for them all.

But again, in Christ Jesus, the waters of life are living and life-giving waters; and whosoever will, let him come and drink of them freely. Thou that art dead in trespasses and sins, upon coming to these waters, thou shalt have a new life, a spiritual life begun in thee; thou shalt be made a new creature, created again in Christ Jesus unto good works. And thou who art complaining that the things that remain in thee, are ready to die; that thy spiritual life is weak

and languishing; and the remainders of corruption ready to extinguish upon thy coming to these waters; thou shalt revive as the corn, and grow as the vine, and shoot forth thy roots as Lebanon; thou shalt renew thy strength; thou shalt walk and not be weary; and run, and not faint, in the ways of holiness.

Finally, in Christ Jesus there are never-failing springs of refreshing, healing, and living waters. The delights of this world are justly compared to a deceitful brook, which the heat of Summer dries up, and which disappoints the expectation of the weary traveller, when he stands most in need. But, what says Christ himself of these waters of grace? "Who-
"soever drinketh of the water that I shall give him,
"shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give
"him, shall be in him a well of water springing up
"into eternal life (a)."

2. The blessings of the new covenant are represented also by milk. Milk, you know, is very nourishing, especially to infants; it is their ordinary food; and God, when he would express the plenty of the land of Canaan, says it is a land that flows with milk and honey. Now, we read in scripture of babes in Christ, who, being unskilful in the word of righteousness, are to be nourished with milk, and not with strong meat. You, then, who are young converts to Christ, here is food suitable to you; the plain, the fundamental truths of Christianity, the exceeding great and precious promises of the word of God, which, as they are of absolute necessity to your edification and comfort, so they are adapted to the meanest capacity. Again, milk is of great use to restore to health weak and decayed persons. Are there not some among you whose spiritual life is feeble and languid? Here, then, is that which will restore you to strength and vigour. Christ will perfect his strength in your weakness, and make his grace sufficient for you; so that out of weakness you shall be made strong, and be

(a) John iv. 14.

be enabled to do all things through Christ which strengtheneth you.

3. And *lastly*, The blessings of Christ's purchase are expressed also by wine, and as you have it in the xxvth chapter of this prophecy, and 6th verse, by wine upon the lees, well refined. Now, in the new covenant, there is that which, like wine used in moderation, revives the spirits, and is fit for those that are of an heavy heart. You, therefore, who are mourning; and bowed down under the convictions of sin, and frequent prevailing of indwelling corruption, here is the wine of consolation: Christ says to you, "Be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee; I will shew thee the joy of my salvation." And what a refreshing cordial is this! - It puts more gladness in the heart, than the wicked can have when their corn and wine are increased. But again, here also is wine to make thee cheerful and vigorous in thy spiritual work and warfare, and to make thee go on in this way rejoicing: For hearken, O Christian, to these reviving promises of the new-covenant, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. When thou goest through the fire and waters of affliction, I will be with thee; I will guide thee by my counsel while here, and afterwards receive thee to glory; and when received into this glory, thou shalt drink new wine with Christ in his Father's kingdom."

Thus, I have briefly laid before you the spiritual and saving blessings, of which we are invited to partake.

III. I now proceed, in the *third* place, To shew you how we are to partake of those blessings; and this you see is expressed by the words, "Come, buy and eat."

1. You are to come. Faith is frequently expressed in Scripture by actions of the body, and by none more frequently than by this, of coming to Christ; and it serves to express the progress and motion of the soul towards him, and the glorious purchase of his blood.

You must come then from sin, both from the love and practice of it, from all your lusts, however dear to you, and from all dependence on any righteousness of your own for acceptance with God. These two, it must be confessed, are difficult points of self-denial: thousands choose rather to perish eternally, than part with either of them. But nothing is more evident from the word of God, than that, except they are both renounced, we can have no share in the blessings of the covenant: For we cannot, at once, be the servants of sin and the servants of Christ. These are two masters whose service is incompatible with each other; and if we go about to establish our own righteousness, we can have no part in the righteousness of God.

But, further, you must come to Christ, not merely assenting to the truth of his doctrine and mission, for such a faith the very devils have, and multitudes of professing Christians have had, who, notwithstanding, are now consigned over to everlasting vengeance; but cheerfully embracing him under all the characters in which he is revealed and offered in the gospel. Come to him, then, and accept him as your Prophet, to illuminate your darkened minds, and make the light of the glory of God in the face of a Redeemer to shine into them, that you may know him in the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings. The Father testified by a voice from heaven, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him." You must therefore listen to his instructions, and receive the law from his mouth. Come to him also, and accept of him as your Priest. Acquiesce in, and rely on that glorious method, which infinite wisdom and love has appointed for satisfying divine justice, and reconciling sinners to God; even that perfect sacrifice of his human nature, which Christ offered up through the eternal Spirit. Depend upon his all-sufficient righteousness, as the sole ground of your justification; and on his powerful and prevalent intercession at the right hand of the

the Majesty on High, for obtaining renewed pardon, and grace to help you in every time of need. Finally, come to him, and receive him also as your king to subdue the enmity of your hearts; to sanctify, as well as to save you; and to rule and govern you by his word and Spirit. Take his yoke upon you, which is easy, and his burthen, which is light. In a word, give yourselves to God in Christ, to be for his honour and glory; all the powers of your souls, and the members of your bodies, all your endowments and attainments, that you may live to the praise of the glory of his grace, obedient to his just authority, and submissive to the will of his providence.

2. That you may partake of the blessings offered in the gospel, you are not only to come, but to buy. This, you will say, is a very strange and extraordinary way of buying, not only without money, (*that* is common enough in the dealings of the world), but without price, without so much as making a price, and promising to pay it. But your surprise will wear off, if you reflect on our Lord's counsel to the church of Laodicea. "Thou art poor," says he, and yet he advises her "to buy of him gold tried in the fire (*a*)."
This buying, then, imports, that the blessings offered in the gospel are so exceedingly precious, that they are worth our obtaining at any rate, and that yet we shall be welcome to them, though we are most unworthy of them, and can make no return that looks like a valuable consideration. These blessings are already bought and paid for. Christ purchased them at an adequate value; not with corruptible things such as silver and gold, but with the price of his own blood, the precious blood of the Son of God, as of a lamb without spot and blemish; and yet, so disinterested is his love, he bestows them freely. Though they cost him so dear, they cost us nothing but acceptance; and whoever is made partaker of them, must have them as the free gift of God, through him, and alone on his account. For,

as the apostle tells us, "The gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord (a)." Come then and buy, *i. e.* make these blessings your own, by receiving them; but come with an empty hand, under a humble sense of your own unworthiness; "for God giveth grace to the humble. He filleth the hungry with good things, while the rich he sends empty away."

3. And *Lastly*, Our partaking of Christ, and of the blessed fruits of his purchase, is expressed by eating;—Come, buy and eat.

As that which we eat is still more our own than that which we only buy, we are here invited to come, and make these spiritual blessings still more our own, by feeding and feasting upon them, for the nourishment and comfort of our spiritual life.

Come then, ye that are hungering and thirsting for Christ, and communion with him; come and feast upon the whole purchase of his blood, in the solemn ordinance which we are soon to celebrate. Feed upon his love, in purchasing those precious blessings at so dear a rate; a love, that many waters could not quench; a love like coals of fire; the most ardent, the most extensive, the most active love; love, in a word, that passeth all understanding. Behold, what manner of love is this? It infinitely transcends our utmost conceptions; nay, it will employ the everlasting admiration of angels, and saints in glory. But again, come and feast also upon the fruits, the blessed and glorious fruits of this love.—But what are these? the pardon and forgiveness of sin; the privileges of God's adopted children; peace and tranquillity of conscience, communion and fellowship with God, or the blessed earnest and foretastes of happiness and glory. "Ho," then, "every one of you that thirsteth, come to these waters; and he that hath no money, come, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk, without money and without price.' "

SER.

SERMON V.

THE NATURE AND PLEASURES OF DEVOTION.

PSALM lxxv. 4.

Blessed is the man whom thou chooshest, and causest to approach to thee, that he may dwell in thy courts.

AMONG the various pleasures of a religious life, there are none greater, or more delightful to the Christian, than those which he enjoys in his approaches to God. As he is altogether lovely in himself, and the centre of their rest and happiness, they cannot but rejoice in his presence, and be happy in divine communion. There is something in the very nature of devotion that exalts the mind, that raises the affections above this world, and that fills the soul with composure and joy. But when our religious worship is performed in public; when we offer up united prayers and praises with the people of God, and join with them in the sacred institutions of the sanctuary; this is a source of peculiar satisfaction to every devout worshipper. A lively sense of this, made the author of this psalm so often long for the house of his God, and so passionately desire to appear before him. He had so often experienced the presence

sence of God in his temple, and was so often satisfied with the goodness of his house, that there was nothing he more earnestly desired than to dwell in the courts of the Lord, and enjoy the pleasures of the sanctuary. This was the one thing he resolved to seek after; for this his soul breathed with the utmost vehemence; his flesh thirsted, yea, even fainted, for the courts of the living God. The same comfortable experience of the loving-kindness of God in his temple, made this holy man so often extol the blessedness of those who had frequent opportunities of approaching the tabernacle, and attending the solemn worship. "Blessed are they," says he, "that dwell in thy house, they will be still praising thee. Blessed is the man whom thou choolest, and causest to approach unto thee, that he may dwell in thy courts." In the opinion of some, these words were spoken by the Psalmist, of those Priests and Levites, whose employment it was to abide near the tabernacle, and attend the temple service. Others make them expressive of the Israelites at large, who, from their local situation, had frequent opportunity of being present at the public worship: Either of these, indeed, may be called dwelling in the courts of the Lord. But we choose to take the words in the latter sense, as extending to every man of Israel, and intimating to us the great happiness of those whom God brings near to himself in the worship of his temple. The general observation, then, which we have to illustrate from these words, is, that approaching to God in the duties of his worship is attended with great pleasure and advantage to the soul.

In illustrating this observation, we propose, *First*, To describe the nature of that approach to God, which is a proof of the divine choice and favour: *Secondly*, To represent the blessedness of such an approach; or show you, that drawing nigh to God in the duties of his worship is attended with great pleasure and advantage to the soul: And, *Thirdly*, Conclude with directing you to some suitable improvement of the subject.

I. We

I. We are to describe the nature of that approach to God, which is a fruit of the divine choice and favour.

When we are said to approach to God, our approach cannot respect his essential presence, which is equally alike in all places. God is necessarily near to all his creatures, he is intimately present with every one of us; for in him, as the apostle expresses it, we live and move, and have our being. In this sense, therefore, we cannot be said to draw near to God, as we are always in his presence, and cannot withdraw from his Spirit. But the expression, approaching to God, plainly respects his gracious presence, which is discovered in the blessings and benefits it bestows on mankind. In some sense, indeed, the gracious presence of God, as well as his essential presence, is common to all; "for he makes his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." But it is in a peculiar manner afforded to a few, even to sincere and good men, by the protection, assistance, and consolation it communicates to them. In this sense, God is said, in scripture, to dwell in the hearts of the righteous, and with them that are of a humble and contrite spirit; and his people may be said to draw near to him, when they inwardly adore and exalt him; when they admire and bless his glorious name; when their minds are possessed with awful and delightful thoughts of his perfections; in a word, when they exercise the various graces and virtues of the divine life, by which an intercourse is maintained between God and the soul. This is the approaching to God mentioned in the text; the peculiar privilege of those pious and devout souls, who are chosen to this blessing, and by divine grace made partakers of it. But, more particularly,

1. We may be said to approach God in the duties of his worship, when we contemplate the divine perfections and providence, with the firm belief of their glory and excellence. Faith is the leading virtue of
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the Christian life, absolutely essential in every approach to God, and indeed the very foundation of religion in the heart. "Without faith," says the apostle to the Hebrews, "it is impossible to please him; for he that cometh to God, must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him (a)." By the exercise of this heavenly grace, Christians raise their affections above this world, and converse with things unseen and eternal: they see him who is invisible to the eye of sense, and, in contemplating his glorious perfections, they obtain some degree of resemblance to them in their own hearts; "beholding, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, they are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord." Faith represents him to the Christian in the most awful, and at the same time in the most amiable and engaging light, not as possessed of almighty power and supreme dominion alone, but of infinite wisdom and perfect goodness; not only as righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works, but as abundant in mercy, of tender compassion, and ready to forgive; as a Spirit, who will be worshipped in spirit and in truth; as a lover of mankind, but a greater lover of holiness: And under such views as these of the glory of God, the Christian inwardly adores him, and pays him that homage which is due to his infinite Majesty. Faith enables him to survey the discoveries he has made of himself in his works, with admiration and delight. Even those dispensations of Providence, which seem to us dark and intricate, and on some occasions inconsistent with infinite wisdom and perfect goodness, appear to the eye of faith to be conducted in the best and wisest manner. Amidst all the uncertainty and seeming imperfection in which he is involved, the Christian considers the secret hand of God as guiding the affairs of this world; and he rests satisfied, that justice and judgment are the habitation of his throne, and that mercy and truth go before his face.

(a) Heb. xi. 6.

face. But especially we draw near to God, when, by faith, we view the method of our salvation through Jesus Christ; that wonderful dispensation of divine grace to sinners, in which mercy and truth are met together, righteousness and peace have embraced each other. It is here the Christian has the sweetest and most intimate access to God; he approaches under the shelter of a divine Mediator, and lifts up his eyes, with humble confidence, to his God, and his Saviour.

2. We draw near to God in the duties of his worship, when we cultivate in our minds a supreme and prevailing love for him. This, indeed, is the natural consequence of a steady faith in the glory and excellence of his perfections; for love reigns and attracts the soul to God, when true faith influences the heart, and a sense of the divine glory possesses the mind. On this account, when the apostle Peter is celebrating that fervent love which the first Christians bore to Christ, he speaks of it as kindled in their breasts by faith; "whom having not seen ye love, in whom, though now ye see him not, yet *believing*, ye rejoice, with joy unspeakable." Love is the very essence and perfection of religious worship; it brings the soul near to God; and, in proportion as our love is great, our devotion is more intense. If we are strangers to this heavenly affection, we will think ourselves happy at a distance from him, and perhaps happiest when least disturbed by the thoughts of his presence. But it is far otherwise with devout and serious Christians. They never think themselves too near; for they feel in their hearts that love, which is the most intimate, as well as the sweetest bond of the soul's communion with God. The saints of God cannot cease to love him: the beauty and excellence of his nature, and the obligations which they owe, are circumstances which excite their highest affection and regard. We love him, says the apostle, because he first loved us. Love is a noble and divine grace, the great source of happiness in our communion with God on earth, and the essential and
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vigorous principle of immortal life. It enters into the happiness within the veil; and is the very element in which the saints in heaven live, and move, and have their being: for God is love, and he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him.

3. We draw near to God in the duties of his worship, when we earnestly desire an interest in his favour, and intimate communion with him. This is the natural effect and constant expression of genuine love. The Christian knows that God alone is an object worthy of his best affections; and in him he finds every thing requisite for gratifying his most enlarged desires. He sees that his favour, which is better than life, can only be the satisfying portion of an immortal soul; and therefore he ardently desires an interest in him. His language is, "I intreated thy favour
" with my whole heart. Lord, lift upon me the
" light of thy countenance. I desire no greater, no
" other reward than this. The men of this world
" may call the favourites of fortune happy; the great,
" the rich, and the prosperous: but may I be ac-
" cepted of God, and I am satisfied. This is the sum
" and the ultimate tendency of my wishes, which I
" would not exchange for all the fading honours and
" perishing enjoyments of the present life." To the same purpose are the devout breathings of the pious Psalmist. "As the hart panteth after the water
" brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God:
" My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God;
" when shall I come and appear before God? O
" God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee:
" my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for
" thee, in a dry and thirsty land where no water
" is, to see thy power and thy glory, so as I have
" seen thee in the sanctuary (a)." Thus the pious soul will naturally express its breathings after God; and this is the very language of true devotion.

4. We approach to God in the duties of his worship, when we exercise a spiritual joy and delight in him.

(a) Psal. xlii. 1, 2.

him. This is the highest, and most exalted instance, of the divine life in the soul. To rejoice in God, and maintain a sense of our interest in him, is the nearest approach we can make to God in this world. Hence, we find, this has been the exercise of the saints in every age. The Psalmist, whose writings every where abound with devotion, is remarkable for his joy in God. "My soul," says he, "shall make her boast in the Lord; O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together." The prophet Isaiah, whose predictions discover so much of an evangelical spirit, declares his resolution to joy in God: "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord; my soul shall be joyful in my God^(a)." And to the same purpose the apostle Paul; "We also joy in God, through our Lord Jesus Christ." The Christian knows, that the perfections of God are the proper foundations of his joy; and he feels an inward complacency, in contemplating the divine character. But still, it is the sense of an interest in him, which gives him the highest and most satisfying delight: this is that which transports the soul, and makes it break forth in the language of David, "The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance, and of my cup; thou maintainest my lot. The lines are fallen to me in pleasant places; I have a goodly heritage." In a word, this spiritual delight in God, in the duties of his worship, bears a near resemblance to the employment of heaven; it is a foretaste of future happiness, and the beginning of eternal joy.

II. We proceed, *secondly*, To represent the blessedness of such an approach to God; or to shew you, that this drawing nigh in the duties of his worship, is attended with great pleasure and advantage to the soul. This will appear, if we consider,

1. The great and glorious Being to whom we approach. God is the source whence all things are derived, and the first cause of the material and intelli-

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(a) Isa. lxi. 12.

gent world : He is possessed of every possible perfection, and amiable excellence ; of every thing that can engage the esteem, and attract the love of his reasonable and intelligent creatures : a Being who is infinitely great, independent of all others ; and who has fulness of perfection and blessedness in himself. This is that glorious Being whom we worship, and to whom we draw nigh. And must there not be something extremely animating to the soul, and affording the highest delight, in the contemplation of his excellence, and in communion with him ?

It is delightful to the pious soul, to contemplate the excellency of the Supreme Being. Truth gives exquisite satisfaction to the mind, just as it is agreeable to the eye to behold the light. But God is the unexhausted fountain, and source of truth ; his nature comprehends infinite treasures of it. He is all-glorious and lovely in himself ; and his perfections, as well as his works, yield matter for heavenly contemplation : In a word, he contains in himself all the amazing scenes of nature, and the more transporting wonders of the world of grace. The mind, then, which contemplates him, must be employed in the very best manner. How delightful must it be to meditate on his perfections, who is light, and in whom there is no darkness at all ? How pleasant, to contemplate that unerring wisdom, that almighty power, that infinite goodness, that unblemished truth, and spotless holiness ; those glorious perfections which shine forth in all his works, and particularly in the work of our redemption ? This is that beauty of the Lord, for the view of which, David desired to dwell in the sanctuary, that he might see his power and his glory, and talk of his goodness in the midst of his temple.

It is likewise most delightful, to enjoy communion and fellowship with God. There is nothing more agreeable in life, and nothing which tends more to cultivate and improve our natures, to alleviate our sorrows, and heighten the pleasure of every enjoyment, than the friendship and conversation of wise
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and good men. What, then, can be imagined more divinely sweet and ravishing to the pious soul, than the friendship of God, and the happy privilege of intercourse and communion with him? As he possesses all beauty and goodness in himself, as his loving-kindness is better than life, and as he is able to do more for us than we can ask or think; to love him, and have the pleasing sense of his love shed abroad in our hearts, must complete our happiness. Hence, says the Psalmist, "Surely it is good for me that I draw near to God:" And again, "How excellent is thy loving-kindness, O Lord! therefore the children of men do put their trust under the shadow of thy wings: they shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house; and thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures (b)." And to the same purpose are all those expressions of love and mutual complacency between Christ and the Church, which we meet with so frequently in the scriptures; especially in that divine song, the Song of Solomon. Indeed, the communications of divine love and favour, are surprisingly delightful and ravishing to the pious soul. These afford serene and satisfying pleasures, which greatly transcend all earthly and carnal joys; as being infinitely more pure, spiritual, and exalted; and of such a lasting and perfect nature, that they run through the various periods of the Christian's life: they support him at death, and, at last, enter with him into the joy of his Lord.

2. The blessedness of such an approach will further appear, if we consider his gracious promise, That he will draw nigh to them who draw nigh to him. This is the constant language of sacred Scripture. "The Lord is nigh," says the Psalmist, "unto all them that call upon him; to all that call upon him in truth (c)." And in the epistle of James, this is expressly promised; "Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you." Now, we cannot ima-

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(b) Ps. xxxvi. 7, 8.

(c) Ps. cxlv. 18.

gine that this is a matter of trifling importance. Is it of little or no consequence to us to be in the gracious presence of the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Author of our mercies? Surely there is something in the very idea of his being near to us, that composes the spirit, and fills the mind with joy and confidence. For, let us consider what it is to have God thus present with us. It is to have him for our effectual support, and never-failing friend; to have his infinite perfections engaged in our behalf in time, and through eternity: it is to have his Providence to protect, and bless, and prosper us, in all our concerns; and his Holy Spirit to lead, and sanctify, and comfort us. This presence of God is accompanied with a comfortable experience of his goodness; leading us in the ways of peace and safety; preserving us unshaken amidst the various dangers of life; and cherishing the principles of goodness in our hearts. And, to complete our happiness, there results hence, the joyful and certain prospect of a future and endless reward, suitable to our desires, and lasting as the days of an immortal spirit. "Happy, surely, is the man, that is in such a case
" as this; happy is he whose God is the Lord: for
" the Lord God is a sun and shield; the Lord will
" give grace and glory; and no good thing will he
" withhold from them that walk uprightly." Who would not then wish to draw near to God, when he has promised to draw near to us, and thus fill us with joy and peace in believing?

3. The blessedness of approaching to God, might be further illustrated, by a particular consideration of the various duties of religion in which we draw nigh to him; such as prayer, singing the praises of God, reading, and hearing his holy word, and devout meditation. This would lead us into a large, though delightful field. We shall therefore only take notice of that duty in which the Christian, with great pleasure and advantage, draws nigh to God, and which we have the near prospect of solemnizing.

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The limits of this discourse will not permit me to represent to you the many and great advantages which accompany the devout performance of this duty. I shall therefore only observe, that it is of admirable service, to strengthen our faith in the efficacy of Christ's death, and his willingness to accomplish our redemption; to inflame our love, and awaken in our minds a more lively sense of our obligations to him; to invigorate our hope, to confirm our good resolutions, and enable us to fulfil them in all holy obedience; and finally, to shed abroad in our hearts those joys of the Holy Ghost, which are so absolutely necessary to support us under affliction, to lead us comfortably through life; and which give us, at last, a joyful entrance into the everlasting kingdom of God our Saviour. Those, it must be confessed, are great and inestimable blessings, which, one should think, would engage us all to a frequent and devout participation of this holy ordinance. From our observations on this subject, we may learn,

1. That a religious life is of all others the most delightful. The men of this world are apt to be prejudiced against religion, as if it were a joyless and melancholy thing, of little use but to damp the pleasures, and embitter the comforts of life. But how unjust is this prejudice? There are no pleasures like those of religion; none which fill the mind with more pure and rational joy, or lead to more certain and delightful consequences. Without religion, there is nothing which deserves the name of pleasure. In the opinion of the wisest men of all ages, the pleasures of sin are as unsatisfying in their nature, as they are of short continuance. Solomon compares them to the crackling of thorns under a pot; he calls them madness, and expressly says of them, that they are all vanity and vexation of spirit. The pleasures of religion, on the other hand, are real and substantial; they satisfy the most enlarged desires of the rational soul; and when every other joy shall vanish, and all the prospects of this life come to a termination, they shall

be the strength and portion of the soul for ever. Taste, and see, then, that God is good. Make the experiment; try the pleasures of religion: and then you will find, "that a day in God's courts, is better than
" a thousand elsewhere; nay, this will put more
" gladness in your hearts, than the wicked have when
" their corn and their wine are increased."

2. Let us with gratitude adore the infinite goodness and condescension of God, in allowing us to draw near to him. How wonderful is it that the Most High God, the Holy One of Israel, should entertain thoughts of mercy for the impure and the unholy! But what manner of love is it? How infinitely more wonderful, that he should place his tabernacle among men, and cause them to approach to him! Justly may we adopt the words of Solomon to express our admiration: "But will God indeed dwell upon
" earth? Behold the heaven, even the heaven of
" heavens, cannot contain thee! O Lord, what is
" man, that thou art mindful of him; or the son of
" man, that thou shouldst visit him?"

3. Let us frequently delight in drawing near to God. Let us not live in a state of alienation from him, who is the Author of our being, and the Fountain of our happiness; but draw near in the duties of his appointment, and endeavour to maintain constant intercourse and communion with him. There is no other method of enjoying ease, and comfort, and happiness, even in this world. Do we not, by this means, walk with God, and in the light of his countenance? Shall we not have more peace in our own minds, and more confidence in the mercy of God? This is the beginning of the heavenly life, a part of the substance of things not seen, and a confirmation to the heart that the full happiness awaits us. Let us, then, make religion our principal concern; let a spirit of devotion run through our whole lives, and influence every part of our conduct. Particularly, beware of living in the neglect of secret prayer, and of family religion. Let us be careful not to absent
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sent ourselves from the house of God ; and, as often as we have an opportunity, let us join in commemorating the dying love of our blessed Redeemer.

And if you would draw nigh to God with acceptance in all the duties of religion, you must draw nigh with sincere and upright hearts. Sincerity is that holy incense that must perfume your spiritual sacrifices. So essentially necessary is sincerity, that, without it, all your professions of religion will be to no purpose ; your most fervent zeal but a solemn mockery ; and your most vigorous obedience an abomination in the sight of God. Let us then draw nigh to God with true hearts ; for he sees not as man sees : he tries the reins, and delighteth in uprightness.

You must likewise draw nigh to God, under a deep conviction of your own unworthiness, and, at the same time, a lively sense of his glory and excellence. You must have a serious awe and veneration of God on your spirits, and you must come with broken and contrite hearts ; for this is a sacrifice which God will not despise.

Finally, you must draw nigh to God, in the prevailing name of the blessed and only Mediator ; for he is the way, the truth, and the life ; and no man cometh to the Father but by him. He has made peace by the blood of his cross ; and now he is offering up the prayers of his saints with certain and never-failing success. “ Having, therefore, brethren, boldness to
“ enter into the holiest, by the blood of Jesus, and
“ having such an High-priest over the house of God ;
“ let us draw near with a true heart, in the full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an
“ evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure
“ water.” Amen.

SERMON VI.

CHRIST THE DESIRE OF ALL NATIONS.

HAGGAI ii. 7.

And the Desire of all nations shall come.

THESE words are part of a memorable prophecy respecting the person and coming of the Messiah. In the preceding chapter, the prophet had reproved the negligence of the Jews in delaying to rebuild the temple of the Lord. "Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your ceiled houses, and this house lie waste? Now, therefore, thus saith the Lord of Hosts, Consider your ways." And when they were persuaded to begin the work, they were discouraged, from this consideration, that, from the poverty of their nation, it was not to be expected that the second temple would equal the splendor and magnificence of the first. Hence, the old men among them, who had seen the glory of the former house, wept at the remembrance of it; the minds of the people were dejected, and their hands ready to hang down. Wherefore, to comfort and encourage them, the prophet comes to them in the name of the Lord, and tells them, that, however this temple might fall short of the former in external pomp and magnificence;

cence ; yet this should be more than balanced by the presence of the Messiah, a greater glory to it than all the riches of Solomon's temple.

“ For thus saith the Lord of hosts, Yet once, it is
“ a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the
“ earth, and the sea, and the dry land ; and I will
“ shake all nations, and the Desire of all nations shall
“ come, and I will fill this house with glory, saith the
“ Lord of Hosts. The silver and the gold is mine,
“ saith the Lord of Hosts. The glory of this latter
“ house shall be greater than the glory of the former,
“ saith the Lord of Hosts : and in this place will I
“ give peace, saith the Lord of Hosts.”

The solemn and sublime manner in which this prophecy is delivered, plainly shews, that something of very great importance is foretold in it. Nothing could have been more gracious, and, at the same time, more awful and full of majesty. The frequent repetition of the glorious title of Lord of Hosts, was, doubtless, to impress their minds with the high importance of what was promised, and to assure them of its accomplishment. Accordingly, we find there were great commotions in the world before the coming of the Messiah. The arms of Greece over-ran the Persian empire in the ravages of Alexander the Great ; the Roman armies swallowed up the divisions of the Grecian conquests ; afterwards, God gave peace to the nations in the reign of Augustus Cæsar ; and then appeared the Messiah, styled here the Desire of all nations ; during the continuance of the second temple. His presence reflected a much greater glory on it than all the outward splendor of that built by Solomon. He filled it with the glory of the divine Majesty, the glory as of the only Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

But we are chiefly to consider the character and description here given of this eminent person, as a proper subject for our meditation, in the view of commemorating his dying love in the holy sacrament. He is styled the Desire of all nations, that is, the glorious

rious object, whom the people of God, in all nations of the world, chiefly desire: a name, indeed, which is above every name, and which well becomes the Son of God, and Saviour of men.

In discoursing on this subject, we propose, through divine assistance, to shew you, *First*, In what sense, and under what restrictions, Christ may be said to be the desire of all nations: *Secondly*, That this character ever has been, still is, and ever will be, applicable to him: *Thirdly*, That he is altogether worthy to be the desire of all nations: and, *Lastly*, Conclude with a suitable application.

I. We are to shew you in what sense, and under what restrictions, Christ may be said to be the desire of all nations. And here a few words will be sufficient.

It is evident, at first view, that this expression is not to be taken in the most extensive and unlimited sense, as importing that Christ was the desired object of all nations and people in the world, without exception. For, though it be granted that many nations, who have not enjoyed the promises nor the preaching of the gospel, have yet, from their conscious incapacity of pleasing God, or from vague tradition, had some expectation of a Saviour from heaven to be the foundation of their hopes; yet many on the face of the earth, neither do, nor can be supposed to have desired him. Others, through ignorance and infidelity, despise and reject him. And in all the nations professing Christianity, too many are practical despisers of Christ. He is not the desire of the wicked. The unbelieving and impenitent give him no place in their hearts; and their language is, We will not have this man to reign over us.

But the expression in the text is evidently to be taken in a limited sense, Christ is the desired object of the elect and people of God, dispersed among all kindreds, tongues and nations of the world. Among those who hear the gospel, he is the desire only of those

those who believe in his name, of those that are chosen, and called, and faithful among the nations: those only have a saving knowledge of him, they love him, they see their need of him, they discern his beauty, they esteem him in his offices, his person and benefits. They desire him, not only as a Saviour from the effects of divine wrath, but as a Teacher, a Sanctifier, and a King. They desire him in his spirit and holiness, as well as in his justifying righteousness; as exalted by God, a Prince and a Saviour, to grant repentance to Israel, and remission of sin.

II. We are to shew that this character ever has been, still is, and ever will be, applicable to Christ, in the sense, and under the restrictions now mentioned.

We propose to give a short illustration of this fact, by attending to the three distinct periods of time which it presents to us.

1. The Lord, Messiah, or Christ, has been the desire of the nations, from the beginning of the world, unto this day.

The proof of this, must be derived from so many historical facts contained in the scriptures of the Old and New Testament, that we can only select a few for your present meditation.

No sooner did mankind fall from their primitive state of innocence and happiness, than immediately a Saviour was promised as the foundation of their hope and comfort. A blessed and glorious seed was held forth to our first parents in that early intimation of life: "The seed of the woman shall bruise the head of the serpent." This was the first ray of hope that enlightened the fallen and benighted condition of human nature; and this, no doubt, revived their desponding minds, and begat in them an earnest desire of so great and needful a blessing. We may well suppose they instructed their children to desire the same promised mercy, and to trust in him for salvation. Accordingly we find this was the excellency

cy of Abel's offering ; for this reason, God had respect to it, because of his faith, and his desires to the promised seed. When Abel was cut off by his brother, the family of Seth, that household of faith and of worship, that memorable line of which Christ was to come, Enoch and the rest of the patriarchs, lived in the hope of the same promise, and ardently longed for its accomplishment.

Noah, the father of the new world, relied on the faithfulness of God in his covenant ; and therefore he is said, by the apostle to the Hebrews, to become heir of the righteousness which is by faith. I need scarcely mention to you Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and others of that favoured and religious family. As their discoveries concerning Christ were more clear and explicit, so their faith and desire increased in proportion. Those holy patriarchs understood the mercy promised, That in their seed all the families of the earth should be blessed. They lived on the promise as a tree of life ; they rejoiced to see Christ's day ; they embraced it afar off, and were glad. Jacob, particularly, when his death was approaching, spoke of the Messiah that was to come, and predicted, that to him should the gathering of the people be. Remarkable words, indeed ; and which, doubtless, would confirm the faith, and fix the desires of his children on the Saviour of the world.

If we look forward to the times of Moses, and the Jewish œconomy, we will find the same desire and expectation still entertained by the people of God. For this purpose, the passover, and the various ceremonies of the Jewish law, were appointed. The tabernacle, the priesthood, and the sacrifices, were all figurative of the Messiah, and designed to raise in that people a religious desire of his appearance. Moses, it is certain, foresaw the day of Christ, and earnestly desired it. Accordingly, he speaks of him as a Prophet whom God would raise up among his brethren. Through faith he kept the passover, and the sprinkling of blood ; and esteemed

steemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt.

In the days of David and the succeeding prophets, we find the Messiah still more and more the desire of the nations. Your time would fail me to mention the various proofs of this important fact. The psalms of David, in particular, abound in divine breathings after the expected Saviour. And, with regard to the prophets, the apostle Peter tells us, "that they inquired diligently, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow (a)." And we have no reason to doubt, that, during the period from the reign of David to the appearance of Christ, the intelligent worshippers among the Jews, served the God of their fathers, in hope of a Saviour to be afterwards revealed.

When our Lord actually appeared in the flesh, there was a vast expectation and desire of his coming in the Jewish nation. This is abundantly evident from the song of Zacharias, the inspired rapture of aged Simeon, the words of Anna, the question which the Priests and Levites put to John the Baptist, and from the conversation of our Saviour with the woman of Samaria. It even appears, that the coming of the Messiah was the common talk and wish of that people; for the eagerness with which they followed any person who assumed the character, is a sufficient proof of this expectation.

Thus, from the beginning of the world, to the coming of the Messiah, through all the intervening times of the patriarchs and prophets, and after the ceasing of the spirit of prophecy in the Jewish church, Christ was the desire of that people and nation.

It only remains to be added, under this particular, that Christ has been the professed desire of all Christian nations, from his ascension to the present times; and that sincere believers, in every age and nation, have

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(a) 1 Pet. i. 10, 11.

have embraced him, as all their salvation and all their desire. The love which he discovered in his incarnation, his death, and his atonement, have pointed him out as the object of their best affections. His resurrection from the dead, and his ascension into heaven, have been the foundation of their faith; and the promise that he will come again in the glory of his Father to raise the dead, and be for ever magnified in them that believe, has kept alive their expectation and warmest regard.

2. Christ is still the desire of the Christian nations. Would to God this could be said literally, and in fact, of all the nations dwelling on the face of the earth. But many of those have never heard of the name by which alone men can be saved. Others who have heard of him continue in unbelief, and still retain their chosen idolatries. The delusions of Mahomet overspreads a considerable portion of the habitable world; and the Jews, in their state of dispersion, remain obstinate against all possible means of conviction.

But, notwithstanding the infidelity of Heathens, Mahometans, and Jews, many nations have embraced the Christian religion; and of these a great multitude, which no man can number, have made Christ their salvation and desire. The distinguishing goodness of God is manifest, in sending the light of the gospel to this remote and distant corner of the earth. We enjoy the offers of grace and mercy, while many are sitting in the region of darkness, and under the shadow of death. And though we be sadly degenerated from the piety and zeal of our fathers, yet, blessed be God, there is still a remnant among us, and, I would hope, a very considerable number, to whom Christ is precious. In the redeemed and faithful at this day, is in part fulfilled (and we trust it will be more and more fulfilled) the prophecy in the text, and other prophecies in scripture, which speak of Christ as a blessing to the nations, a light to the Gentile world, and salvation to the ends of the earth.

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3. Christ will be the desire of the nations to the end of the world. The importance of the gospel to mankind, together with the promises in sacred scripture, are proofs of its continuance and increase. We look for happier times, when the blessed Redeemer shall be more the desire of the nations than he has yet been. "The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in a field; which, indeed, is the least of all seeds; but, when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree: so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof." We look for a happy and glorious day, when the gospel shall be sent to the nations and isles afar off, which have not heard of Christ's fame, nor seen his glory; when the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, and all the families of it shall call him blessed. We look for a wonderful effusion of the Spirit of light and grace from on high, and a glorious enlargement of the Church of Christ. We look, in a word, for the fall of Antichrist, for the conversion of the Jews, with the fulness of the Gentiles; when the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever.

We are altogether ignorant at what period of time this glorious state of things shall be accomplished. An obscure vail is drawn over the times and the seasons, which the Father hath kept in his own power. But the evidence by which this fact is supported, arising from the gradual progress of Christianity in the hearts of men, and over the world, and the express declarations of sacred writ in behalf of the glory of the latter days, are sufficient to convince us, that the Saviour of the world will be more and more the desire of men, even to the consummation of all things.

III. We are to shew, that Christ is altogether worthy to be the desire of all nations.

1. This character, the desire of all nations, is due to the Messiah, or Christ, from the infinite excellence of his nature.

In every instance, it is becoming in the human character, to desire the affection of the benevolent and the worthy. But the most benevolent and worthy of the human race have a limited sphere of action, and, of consequence, a limited esteem. No man, either from the dignity of his character, or the real value of his actions, is entitled to be universally the object of desire and admiration. It requires something vastly superior to any merit with which we are acquainted, to give a reasonable claim to this exalted distinction. This merit our Saviour possesses in the original perfection of his nature, as the eternal and only begotten Son of God, the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person. We can form no idea of power, or wisdom, or goodness, existing in the Supreme Mind, which, in scripture, is not also ascribed to the Saviour of men. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him, was not any thing made that was made.

This excellency of our Redeemer is perfectly exclusive of every opposite quality. Every character on earth is stained with imperfection. Even the best and most improved saints, amidst all the virtues that adorn them, are yet in many things weak and irregular. But the excellencies of Christ are pure and unmixed. He did no sin, neither was guile found in his lips. He was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separated from sinners. His nature was without any mixture of imperfection; his character without blemish; and all his actions godlike and divine. View him in what light you please, consider him in your most serious thoughts, and you will find him altogether worthy to be the desire of all men. Whatever excellence is discernible among created beings, is to be found in him in an infinitely more perfect degree.

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When we look abroad among the creatures of God, and figure to our imagination those which are not seen, we can conceive strength in one, beauty in another, faithfulness in a third, and wisdom in a fourth; but in Jesus Christ all those excellencies are united; "for it pleased the Father," says the apostle to the Colossians, "that in him should all fulness dwell." In a word, he has every excellence in the highest degree; almighty power, unerring wisdom, infinite goodness, unblemished truth, and spotless holiness; every thing, indeed, capable of exciting the desire of an intelligent being: for in him, says the apostle, dwell all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. He infinitely transcends the highest created being in the independent excellence of his nature. Others derive their excellencies from him as streams from a fountain; but he is the source and spring whence they flow. The glories of Christ are perfectly adequate to the most enlarged desires of the soul: and, to add no other circumstances from the excellencies of his nature which should make him be desired of men, the beauty of all other things fades away, but the loveliness of Christ endures to eternity: "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." Never, indeed, was there such shining piety, never such glorious virtue, never such miraculous goodness, never such unfeigned humility, never such invincible patience, and, to say all in one word, never so much of heaven on earth, never so much of God in man, as there was in the temper and character of Jesus Christ: "He is fairer than the children of men; grace is poured into his lips; for God, his God, has anointed him with the oil of gladness above his fellows." This Being, infinitely exalted in his nature and perfections, is worthy of the desire of all nations.

2. This character, the desire of all nations, is due to Christ, from his qualifications as Mediator between God and man. As he came into the world to sustain the character, and fulfil the work of Mediator,

so he was in all respects well qualified to fulfil it. "Who is this," says the prophet, "that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah?" "This, that is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength? I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save." And the Apostle to the Hebrews draws this important inference from his reasoning; "wherefore he is able to save them to the uttermost that come to God by him (a)." The mysterious union of the divine with the human nature, fitted him in an admirable manner for the work of redemption. As he was God, he was able to offer up a perfect sacrifice, and to redeem the Church by his blood. His divine nature supported him under his sufferings, and enabled him to conquer principalities and powers, and nail them to his cross. By his humbling himself to become man, he was capable of yielding obedience to his Father's will. In a word, the holiness and purity of his character, the full commission he received from God, and the perfect unction of the Spirit, that oil of gladness, where-with he was anointed above his fellows, conspired to qualify him for accomplishing our salvation. And as he was able, so was he willing to undertake and accomplish it. No sooner was the redemption of fallen mankind proposed in the councils of the Everlasting, than he said, "Lo, I come, in the volume of the book it is written of me; I delight to do thy will, O my God." Here, then, we have a noble and engaging description of our Saviour; a Mediator come into the world, a Mediator perfectly qualified for his work, possessed of every divine excellence, and yet condescending to appear in our nature.

3. This character is due to Christ, from his offices as Mediator. As the appointed Mediator between God and man, he was invested with various offices, suited to the different wants of sinners. He is a Prophet, to dispel their ignorance; a Priest, to remove their guilt, and to procure their salvation; and a King,

(a) Heb. vii. 25.

King, to subdue their enmity, and, by his power, to overcome the enemies of their souls. In each of these characters, he is infinitely worthy to be the desire of all nations.

(1.) As a Prophet, on account of that divine revelation which he has published to the world. Before the appearance of our Saviour, the nations of men were sitting in darkness, and in the shadow of death. A vail of ignorance overspread the Gentiles; their understandings were darkened; they wandered in wild superstition, and in most abominable idolatry. The Jews themselves, although the chosen people of God, and favoured with a discovery of his will, had grossly corrupted their religion, and almost lost the knowledge of it, amidst unwritten traditions. In this degenerated, and benighted state of the nations, the Messiah appeared as the light of the world; a light to enlighten the Gentiles, and the glory of his people Israel. "He came," as the prophet expresses it, "to destroy the face of the covering cast over all people, and the vail that was spread upon the nations." He appeared as the great Apostle of our profession, and Angel of the covenant; the Messiah, and Anointed of the Lord, whom the Father employed for revealing his mind to the world. This, he himself informs us, was the design of his mission: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; to bind up the broken-hearted; to proclaim liberty to the captives; recovering of sight to the blind; and to preach the acceptable year of the Lord (a)." All his discourses to the multitudes, and to his disciples, breathed the wisdom of a divine spirit. He made mankind acquainted with the whole counsel of God concerning their salvation; he confirmed his doctrine by the most unquestionable miracles; he enforced his precepts by the most powerful motives; and, that nothing might be wanting to teach men their duty, and encourage them to the practice, he gave

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(a) Luke iv. 18, 19.

us, in his own life, a most perfect and amiable example of all that he required of us. In what an affectionate and engaging manner did he instruct and persuade? He spoke with the majesty and authority of a God, and yet with the condescension and gentleness of a man. He so charmed his audience with the heavenly strains of his doctrine, that all bore him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth. Even the officers who were commissioned to apprehend him, were obliged to confess, that never man spake like this man. How tenderly did he expostulate with sinners? How earnestly did he invite the weary and heavy laden to come to him? And with what wisdom and meekness did he bear with the infirmities of his own disciples? The bruised reed he did not break, the smoking flax he did not quench, till he sent forth judgment unto victory. The excellency of his character, and the value of his instructions as a prophet, are such, that the Christian who has the most extensive sense of his duty, and the greatest love for holiness, can find nothing wanting in his precepts, and nothing more amiable than his life. A character so perfect, could it have existed in any other instance, would have deserved the love and admiration of the human race. But when we consider, that this example, and those instructions, were for the benefit of mankind, what forbids every individual of mankind to regard this Prophet as the object of his constant desire. Let us add, that the office of a prophet, is not confined to the moral instructions which he was pleased to communicate, as the rule of our conduct. He has revealed, in the most unequivocal terms, great and important facts respecting the future destination of man. He has brought life and immortality to light by the gospel, and given us the knowledge of salvation, through the remission of sin. Desirable to the weary traveller, is the first light of the morning. Welcome is the natural sun which gilds the earth with his rays, which cheers us with his influences,

ences, and guides us in our journeyings and labours. But incomparably more desirable is that Day-spring from on high, which has visited us; that Sun of righteousness which is risen with healing in his wings, to give light to them who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, and to guide their feet into the ways of everlasting peace.

(2.) As a Priest, he is worthy to be the desire of all nations. In this character he is represented, in the sacred scriptures. He is compared by the apostle Paul, to the high-priest under the Jewish dispensation, who entered into the holy place with the blood of the sacrifice, and made atonement for the sins of the people. But in many respects, the priesthood of Christ was infinitely superior. The high-priest under the law, was himself but a sinful man; and therefore, needed to offer for his own sins as well as for the sins of others. But Christ was holy, harmless, and undefiled, and separate from sinners. Though he had made his soul an offering for sin, yet he had done no iniquity; neither was guile found in his mouth. The Jewish high-priests were mortal, and continued not, by reason of death; but this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. The priests under the law, offered only the blood of slain beasts, which could not possibly take away sin. But our great High-priest offered up himself, his own precious blood, as a sacrifice and atonement for the sins of the world. Not by the blood of goats and calves, says the apostle to the Hebrews, but by his own blood, he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us. How lovely, then, is Jesus, as a Priest? infinitely more excellent than all the family of Aaron: But especially when the believer views him by faith as suffering upon the cross, enduring the wrath of God, and never quitting his station, till justice was fully satisfied, and he was able to cry out with the voice of triumph, It is finished. Considered in this light, is he not worthy to be the desire of the nations?

tions? And is he not still a lovely High-priest, now that he is passed into the heavens, and appears in the presence of God for us?

(3.) As a King, on account of his gift of the Spirit, and the government which he exercises over the world and the church. The nations of men are not only involved in guilt, but deeply polluted by sin. This is the account the scripture every where gives us of our deplorable condition. And, indeed, we need only consult the history of mankind in former ages, or attend to our own observation and experience, to be convinced of it. Now, in this corrupt state of man, when the nations were at enmity with God, and, consequently, incapable of eternal life, the divine Redeemer appeared, and made effectual provision for our being sanctified and reconciled to God. He purchased, and sent the Holy Spirit, as a fountain opened to all nations, for sin, and for uncleanness: "He was made a curse for us, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith (b)." And what an invaluable blessing is this to mankind? Nothing, indeed, can be of greater consequence to us, in our present state of depravity and guilt. How infinitely worthy, then, is He to be the desire of all nations, who gave himself for us, that he might thus redeem us from all iniquity, and purify to himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works; who, for our sakes, spoiled principalities and powers, and, making a show of them openly, triumphed over them on his cross; who, in fine, conquered death and the grave, and rendered the victory so extensive, that every believer may triumph over them in the words of the apostle; "O Death, where is thy sting? O Grave, where is thy victory? Thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

It now remains to make some practical improvement of what has been said. And,

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(b) Gal. iii. 13, 14.

1. Is Christ the desire of all nations? Hence, we may learn, that he is the true and promised Messiah. Was it foretold concerning the Messiah, that to him should the Gentiles seek; that the gathering of the people should be to him; and that nations which knew him not, should be blessed with the knowledge of him? All this was remarkably accomplished in our Lord Jesus Christ, who is eminently the desire of the nations. This is he that should come; and the nations look for no other.

2. How incomparably happy must that nation be, which enjoys Christ in the power and purity of gospel ordinances? If Christ, represented under a veil of legal ceremonies, made Canaan the glorious land, as we find it is called once and again, by way of distinction (*d*); what a glorious place must that country be, the inhabitants of which behold him, as it were, unveiled in the brightness of the gospel? O that we knew our happiness, and the day of our merciful visitation; for, what many prophets and saints of old desired to see and hear, we enjoy. Let us therefore be thankful for our privileges, and careful to improve them; lest the gospel, by the righteous judgment of God, be taken away, and our abused seasons of grace be brought to a speedy termination.

3. How vile and provoking a sin must it be in any nation, upon whom the light of the gospel shines, to reject Jesus Christ, and, in effect, to say with those in the book of Job, "Depart from us, we desire not the knowledge of thy ways?" How base and ungrateful to disregard his worship, to despise his messengers, and declare, by our actions, that "we will not have this man to reign over us!" In the primitive days of Christianity, this was the conduct of the Jews. They put away Christ from among them, and, by that means, judged themselves unworthy of eternal life. But, how soon did vengeance overtake them! Let us beware, lest, by our unbelief and contempt of the gospel, we, in like manner, provoke

provoke the Lord to depart from us, and even to make us desolate; a land not inhabited: And wo, wo, will be to us indeed, if the Lord depart from us.

4. What reason have we to pity and lament the blindness and misery of the Jews, and other nations, in their obstinate infidelity? The Jews are the most inexcusable of all the unbelieving nations; and God has remarkably punished them above all people, by a long continued, and general dispersion among the kingdoms of the earth: So that they are, as it were, set up a spectacle to the nations; a standing monument of the terrible judgment of God.

And now, to conclude, let us therefore, without wavering, hold fast the profession of our faith: and may the God of all grace, grant that we may continue grounded, and settled in it, that when Christ, the desire of the nations, shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed at his coming.

SERMON VII.

THE FULNESS OF CHRIST ILLUSTRATED.

COLOSS. i. 19.

For it pleased the Father, that in him should all fulness dwell.

THE apostle, from the 12th verse of this chapter, having mentioned several of the great and glorious privileges we enjoy by the gospel, in the 15th verse, and downwards, gives a sublime character and description of the blessed Redeemer, by whom they were procured.

It deserves your particular attention, that this apostle, in many of his epistles, when he is insisting on this subject, finds his soul under such a constraining power of divine love, that he delights to dwell on the heavenly theme: his heart is enlarged in the high praises of his Redeemer; and as we take pleasure in speaking of those whom we love and esteem, it was impossible for him to suppress or conceal the emotions of his love, while describing the beauty and excellence of its object. Here you may observe, the apostle labours, as it were, under the weight of his subject. The expressions he makes use of, are lively and strong. He seems, however, to be sensible, that they come infinitely short of the dignity of
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the person whom he attempts to describe. He calls him the image of the invisible God; the first-born of every creature, by whom all things were created, that are in heaven and in earth, visible and invisible; and therefore, he is before all things, and by him all things consist.

And having thus described our Redeemer as equal to the Father, he next shews what he is as Mediator. He is the Head of his mystical body, the Church; the Beginning, the First-born from the dead, the First who rose from the dead by his own power, and rose to an immortal life, never to die any more, that in all things he might have the pre-eminence. Then follow the words of the text; "For it pleased the Father, that in him should all fulness dwell."

We may consider these words as expressive of our Saviour's qualifications for that important charge, the Head of the Church; and of the Father's reason for advancing him to that eminent dignity and power. Or, we may view them in a somewhat more extended sense; as the foundation of his all-sufficiency as Mediator, his being able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him.

By the fulness that dwells in Christ, we are not to understand his perfections, as he is God; for those are essential to him, and not communicated at the Father's pleasure; neither that fulness of which the apostle speaks (a), whereby his mystical body, the Church, is gradually completed; for fulness can only be said to dwell in Christ in this sense, when all who belong to the election of grace are gathered unto him. But we are here to understand, that fulness of grace and truth, as the evangelist John calls it, which he, as Head of his Church in general, and of every believer in particular, is constantly communicating to his servants, and out of which they are daily receiving, and grace for grace. This fulness is said in the text to dwell in Christ.

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(a) Eph. i. 2, 13.

Under the Old Testament dispensation, at certain times and seasons, the Spirit was communicated to the prophets, as it pleased God, and as the occasions of the church required: But it is said to dwell in him; it has its constant and unchangeable residence in our Mediator. And, finally, you may observe, it is said, "It pleased the Father, that in him this fulness should dwell:" a circumstance which plainly intimates, that Christ did not usurp, or violently possess it; but that there was a perfect coincidence between him and the Father, who is here considered as most highly injured by the apostasy of man, and therefore behoved to be pleased with the method of his recovery.

Having thus explained the words, I shall endeavour, by divine assistance, *First*, To give you some account of the fulness that dwells in Christ; *Secondly*, Mention a few of its endearing characters; and then make some practical application.

I. I shall endeavour to give you some account of the fulness that dwells in Christ; and, indeed, all that I can say upon it, must fall infinitely beneath the rich and inexhaustible subject. The apostle himself seems at a loss for words to express it. Even the angels that surround the throne of God are continually admiring, while they can never comprehend, the exceeding riches of his grace. What therefore I propose, is to mention a few things concerning the fulness which dwells in Christ; and to lay before you the view which the gospel gives us concerning it, in order that your desires after it may be strengthened and confirmed.

1. There is in Christ a fulness of merit. This will appear, if we consider that he is the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person, equal to him in all perfections; and particularly, that he is independent, and could dispose of himself according to his pleasure, and, consequently, undertake for the guilty and undeserving. By hum-

bling himself to become man, he was capable of suffering. He came in the form of a servant, and made himself of no reputation. He was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separated from sinners. Considered as man, the Holy Ghost was given to him without measure, in order that he might be well-pleasing to God, who is possessed of infinite holiness; that he might have no need to satisfy for himself, and that he might afford to mankind a perfect and holy example. Is there not, then, a fulness of merit in Christ, especially when you reflect, that though he was infinitely exalted above us, though he was our justly offended Sovereign, yet he voluntarily and cheerfully undertook the arduous work of our redemption? "Lo, I come," says he, "in the volume of thy book it is written of me; I delight to do thy will, O my God (a)."

2. There is in Christ a fulness of purchase. This is founded upon his merit, and on the actual performance of what he so generously undertook in behalf of the human race. For the Father having promised, that, upon his fulfilling his engagements, he should see his seed, of the travel of his soul, and be satisfied; and he having actually fulfilled them, the unshaken veracity of God assures us, that there is in him a fulness of purchase. This he himself proclaimed upon the cross, when he said, "It is finished;" and then bowed his head, and gave up the ghost. What was finished? Satisfaction to the justice of God was fully given, and complete salvation obtained for a guilty world. This fulness of purchase the Father attested when he raised him from the dead. For the resurrection of Christ was, as it were, his discharge from the hand of justice, a public and authentic declaration on God's part, that he accepted the sacrifice of his death, as a full atonement for the sins of his people; that their debt was fully paid, and, consequently, their salvation completely purchased. And this also our Saviour gloriously demonstrated to the world;

world, when he ascended up on high, and led captivity captive; when he ascended to take possession of the purchased inheritance, and to secure to all his followers an entrance into heaven.

3. There is also in our blessed Saviour a fulness of application, that is, of power and goodness to apply what he has merited and purchased. This is evident, from his exaltation at the right hand of the Majesty on high; and his having obtained a name above every name, whether in heaven or in earth, far above all principalities and powers, and thrones and dominions, that at the name of Jesus every knee might bow, and tongue confess. Of this we are assured by himself. "All power," says he, "is given unto me in heaven and in earth (a)." He was exalted, not only that he might be an Intercessor, and powerful Advocate with the Father, in behalf of his people, but likewise that he might be invested with the power of bestowing upon them what he had purchased; and in him dwell all the treasures of wisdom, grace, and glory. And therefore,

4. There is in him a fulness of pardoning grace. He can forgive the most heinous offences, and sins of the greatest enormity; and he to whom his pardon is vouchsafed, shall never come into condemnation. How encouraging is this to poor, convinced, and trembling sinners! Perhaps thou art afflicted, because thy sins are without number, of long continuance, and so aggravated, that they cannot be forgiven. But think, and seriously think, on the infinite fulness of Christ's saving power, and that you have full redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins; "For he is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him; and whoever cometh, he will in no wise cast out." How encouraging is this also to the believer, who is groaning under the weight of indwelling corruption, and crying out with the Psalmist, "Iniquities prevail against me!" Fear not, Christian, thy Redeemer is almighty; he has received

a commandment, and is himself inclined to save thee. Hear his own precious words: "I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth on me, though he were dead, yet shall he live."

5. There is also in Christ a fulness of pity and compassion for his people under all their weaknesses and afflictions. Though he be exalted to the highest degree of majesty and glory, he still acts towards them with the greatest tenderness, sympathy, and love. He wears their names upon his heart before the Father, and he kindly intercedes for them. He has a fellow-feeling with them in all their distresses, and in his love and pity he redeems them. "We have not a High Priest," says the apostle, "that cannot be touched with a feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin (a)." "The bruised reed he will not break, the smoking flax he will not quench, till he bring forth judgment unto victory." The injuries done to his people, he considers as done to himself. He "that toucheth them, toucheth the apple of his eye." The sympathy of our fellow-creatures is often unavailing; but the sympathy of Christ is always powerful and effectual. It gives actual relief to his servants, under all their wants, their frailties, and afflictions. For,

6. There is in him a fulness of light. Does the Christian walk in darkness? Is he uncertain what path of duty to pursue? This is sometimes the case with the people of God. In Christ, their exalted Head, are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. "He is the true light, that lighteneth every man that cometh into the world;" and, in a peculiar manner, he is the light of his humble followers. He instructs them by his word, and guides them by his Spirit; so that they hear, as it were, a voice behind them, "This is the way, walk ye in it." Are any of you then in doubt, either with respect to your duty, or the state of your souls be-

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(a) Heb. iv. 15.

fore God? To whom should you look but to this great Prophet, in whom it hath pleased the Father that all fulness of light should dwell. It is his peculiar office to open the blind eyes, and give light to them that sit in darkness. He has done it for multitudes already; and God has promised, that, under his conduct, "he will bring the blind by a way that they knew not, and will lead them in paths they have not known; that he will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight."

7. There is in Christ a fulness of life. He has not only life in himself, independent of every creature; but he is the Fountain and Dispenser of life to the children of men. He quickens them that are dead in trespasses and sins; and implants that principle of spiritual life, which is the earnest and pledge of life everlasting. Are any of his people, the members of his mystical body, under a sad decay with respect to the exercise of grace? Is their spiritual life, like fire under the ashes, ready to be extinguished? He is their living head, who communicates new supplies of life, to revive their languishing graces. And hence that gracious promise, "I will be as the dew unto Israel: They shall revive as the corn, and grow as the vine (a)." To him, therefore, O Christian, thou must look up, when thou findest thy love cold, and thy heart lifeless in duty, when thou art complaining of deadness and languor of spirit; for he alone is the Fountain of life; nay, he is said in scripture to be his people's life, and has expressly promised, that "because he lives, they shall live also (b)."

8. There is likewise, in our blessed Mediator, a fulness of strength. Hence, we have that remarkable prediction, "Surely shall one say, In the Lord have I righteousness and strength, and in him shall the seed of Israel glory (c)." He is an Almighty Redeemer, who has all power in heaven and on earth. In him, as his people's head, there is a fulness of strength,

(a) Hof. xiv. 5, 7.

(b) John xiv. 19.

(c) Isa. xlv. 24, 25.

strength, to enable them to perform the most difficult duties, to overcome the most powerful temptations, and to support them under all their afflictions. "My grace," says he, "is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness." Fear not, then, ye who sincerely believe in him; for though your strength be small, and the difficulties you may have to encounter, many and great, your refuge is on high, the mighty God is your strength: He who spoiled principalities and powers, and made a shew of them openly on his cross, will still maintain the conquest he has gained. You are ready, perhaps, to faint in the performance of duty, or at the prospect of danger; so that you walk in the paths of holiness with a trembling and a feeble heart. But, hear in what encouraging words he addresses you! "Fear not, thou worm, Jacob; I will help thee, saith the Lord, thy Redeemer (a)." Wait, therefore, on the Lord, and be of good courage; for they that wait on him shall renew their strength; they shall walk, and not weary; they shall run, and not faint.

9. I shall only add, that, in Christ Jesus, there is a fulness of consolation and joy. In scripture, he is styled the Consolation of Israel. "If," says the apostle, "there be any consolation in Christ:" the question amounts to a strong affirmation,—as certainly as there is abundant consolation in him. Whence do the comforts of the Holy Ghost proceed? Is it not from Christ, who is the only Fountain of true joy? In him is pure and unmixed consolation; consolation which satisfies and gladdens the soul; fills it with joy unspeakable, and enables the Christian to glory in tribulation, and even triumph amidst the flames. Why, then, believer, art thou sad and dejected? Why do thy hands hang down, and thy knees grow feeble? "Here is beauty for ashes, and the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness. Be glad in the Lord,"

(a) Isa. xli. 14.

“ Lord, and rejoice, ye righteous. Let the children
“ of Zion be joyful in their king.”

II. But I now come, *secondly*, To mention, and briefly illustrate, a few endearing characters of this mediatory fulness which, it hath pleased the Father, should be in Christ.

1. It appears evident, from the observations we have already made, that this fulness is to be communicated to all those who sincerely believe in his name, who are the true members of his church or mystical body. Hence, it is represented as an open fountain: “ In that day,” says the prophet, “ there shall be a
“ fountain opened to the house of David, and to the
“ inhabitants of Jerusalem (a);” that is, to all sincere believers, without exception, who, as the spiritual seed of Christ, are of the house of David, and, as living members of the church, are inhabitants of Jerusalem. Nay, we are not only allowed, but kindly invited to come to it for pardoning mercy, for life, strength, and consolation. “ Ho, every one,” says he, “ that thirsteth, come to the waters; and ye that
“ have no money; come, buy wine and milk, with-
“ out money, and without price.”—“ In that last
“ day,” says the evangelist, “ the great day of the
“ feast, Jesus stood and cried, If any man thirst, let
“ him come to me and drink (b).”

2. It is an abundant and inexhaustible fulness. This is the fulness, of which all the saints, that ever lived, both under the Old and New Testament dispensations, have been receiving, and of which all the redeemed and glorified around the throne of God shall receive to eternity. It is so connected with the infinite perfections, and everlasting strength of Almighty God, that it flows with an undiminished and unceasing stream of happiness and comfort to all those who are purified by the blood of Christ. From the influences that flow from this fulness, their happiness is even every moment increased. This,
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(a) Zech. xiii. 1.

(b) John vii. 37.

in a word, is that pure river of the waters of life, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb, the streams whereof continually make glad the city of God.

3. It is an unchangeable fulness. For Christ, in whom it dwells, is the same Almighty Redeemer to-day, yesterday, and for ever. Of this fulness, he can neither be deprived by the powers of earth nor hell: "I give to my sheep," says he, "eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand." At his death, indeed, the powers of darkness endeavoured, by every exertion of malice and strength, to prevent him from possessing it; but he triumphed over them in his cross, and he still triumphs over them in the grace which he communicates to his servants. Let not the Christian, then, be afraid, as if any thing could hinder the communication of this fulness for the support of his spiritual life. As the union between Christ and believers can never be dissolved; so, there will be constant communications from Him, their exalted Head, to secure their continuance in his love. This was the ground of the apostle's triumph, when he exclaims, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Nay, in all these things, we are more than conquerors, through him that loved us (a)."

4. To mention no more, the most endearing consideration of all is, that it is a suitable fulness. The Christian can labour under no necessity or want, in which this fulness will not afford assistance and consolation. Though it be of inestimable value, yet, the poor, as well as the rich, the weak, as well as the strong, the meanest, as well as the greatest, will find it adapted to their particular case and circumstances. Is the Christian in prosperity or adversity, in health or in sickness, dejected or elated? The fulness of Christ is exactly adapted to his situation. A sove-
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reign and universal remedy for the diseases of the body, has been earnestly desired, and anxiously sought after by mankind in every age. This remedy has hitherto baffled every attempt to procure it: But I am warranted to declare, with confidence, that there is, in Christ's mediatorial fulness, a remedy for all the diseases and wants of the soul; nay, further, a remedy which affords the best support and consolation under all the pains and distempers of the body. What shall we then think of this fulness? It infinitely transcends what we can either express or conceive. It becomes us, therefore, to contemplate it with the highest admiration. It is the wonder of angels, and will be the subject of praise to the saints, through the ages of eternity.

Thus, I have endeavoured to give you some account, from the word of God, of the fulness which, it hath pleased the Father, should dwell in Christ. I come now to make some practical improvement of this subject.

1. Let us celebrate the praises of God, and admire his wisdom in the scheme of man's redemption. The covenant is indeed well ordered in all things, and sure. In the first covenant, the happiness of man was, as it were, placed in his own hand. He had a power to fulfil the condition, which, if he had employed aright, he, doubtless, would have obtained the life that was promised. But having forfeited all right to the blessing, and lost his power, both he and his posterity would have perished for ever, if this wonderful expedient had not existed in the counsels of God! It pleased the Father, that in Christ should all fulness dwell. When we consider the covenant of grace in this light, how wonderful does it appear! how wisely ordered for securing the glory of God, and the comfort and happiness of his people! This fulness of Christ gives us an assurance of hope and stability, which Adam, in a state of innocence, never enjoyed. He stood upon uncertain ground, his own free will, which

which might be, and was actually, shaken. But here is a foundation laid in Zion, that shall never be moved. The faithful in Christ will be happy through eternity; for they will be happy, as long as there is fulness in their glorious Redeemer. "O, the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and love of God!"

2. Let us bless the Lord that ever he was pleased to reveal this fulness to us. There are many nations on the face of the earth, yet strangers to the covenant of promise, and without Christ in the world. What reason have we, then, to adore the distinguishing goodness of God, when, instead of sitting in darkness, and under the shadow of death, this Day-spring from on high hath visited us, and the Sun of righteousness hath arisen with healing in his wings? Do not those glad tidings of great joy deserve returns of the warmest gratitude? Without this revelation, it had been the same to us, as if no such fulness had ever existed. Have we not reason, then, to say with the Psalmist, "The lines are fallen to us in pleasant places, and we have a goodly heritage?" Have we not reason to shew forth the praises of him, who hath called us out of darkness into this marvellous light?

3. Let it be your first and principal concern to know this fulness in a saving and a practical manner. The theory of it is of little importance, unless you can say, from your own experience, that you are assured of the blessing, and have tasted that the Lord is gracious; an effect which can only be produced, in consequence of a spiritual union between Christ and your souls. This union to Christ, is the foundation and bond of communion with him. You must be living members of his mystical body, before you can derive influences of grace from the blessed Head. Be persuaded, therefore, you who are yet unbelievers, and, of consequence, have no interest in the fulness of Christ, be persuaded, I intreat you, as you love your

own souls, and would be happy in time, and through eternity, earnestly to seek to be united to him, by a sincere and lively faith, that so you may partake of that forgiveness, that spiritual life, and strength, and consolation, which he is ready to impart to you. "Behold," says he, "I stand at the door, and knock; if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come into him, and will sup with him, and he with me."

4. Let me intreat you, who are sincere believers in Christ, to apply to him daily for the supply of all your wants. And surely, the experience you have of your own weakness, and a regard to your interest, should engage you to this application; for you have no strength of your own; nay, the Spirit of truth tells you, that you are not sufficient, of yourselves, to think so much as a good thought, far less to perform the many duties that are incumbent upon you. To whom should you apply for assistance? Not surely to those who are weak and helpless, and require assistance as much as yourselves. Necessity, then, and a concern for your own best and everlasting interest, should oblige you to have constant recourse to the fulness that is in Christ. And have you not the greatest encouragement to do so? It hath pleased the Father, that in him all fulness should dwell; and for this very end, that you may receive, and grace for grace. Why, then, complain of darkness and spiritual decay? Here you have a never-failing supply of all-sufficient grace provided for you; and you are kindly invited to come, that you may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in every time of need. Let the life you live in the flesh be by faith on the Son of God.

And, finally, walk worthy of the high privileges which you enjoy; for divine communications demand the most grateful returns. Be diligent in your attendance on gospel ordinances; in reading and hearing the word of God; in serious meditation, secret prayer, and a devout participation of the Lord's Supper, as often as you have an opportunity; for these

are the instituted means of your communion with Christ, and they are also expressions of thankfulness. Walk in subjection to the law of Christ. Shew that you love him, and are obedient to him; that you live under the government and dominion of his grace, and are devoted to his will. Beware of every thing that might justly provoke him to withhold the communications of his love; and make it evident to all around you, that his grace bestowed upon you, is not without its natural and proper fruits.

Walk, in a word, as witnesses for the Lord Jesus. Give testimony of him before the world; and O be concerned to give a just and proper testimony. You have declared this day before God, angels, and men, that you glory only in him as your exalted Lord and Head. Walk, then, agreeably to that profession; proceed in his ways, humbly depending on his assistance and direction, and indulging the hopes that he will enable you to persevere in your duty, and at last present you faultless before the presence of his glory, with exceeding joy.

And now, unto Him that is able to keep you from falling, and to do exceeding abundantly above all that you can ask or think; to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.

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SERMON VIII.

RESIGNATION TO GOD UNDER THE AFFLICTIVE DISPENSATIONS OF HIS PROVIDENCE INCULCATED.

PART I.

Psalms cxix. 75.—*I know, O Lord, that thy judgements are right, and that in faithfulness thou hast afflicted me.*

MAN is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upwards. None of us can foretell the trials that may await us in this house of our pilgrimage; and therefore, it is both our duty and our interest, to lay our account with them, and to prepare for them, that, when they come, we may bear them with that meekness and resignation, which David expresses in the words that I have now read:—"I know, O Lord, that thy judgements are right, and that in faithfulness thou hast afflicted me."

This amiable temper I shall, *First*, Endeavour to explain. *Secondly*, Represent to you the deformity and sinfulness of its opposite. *Thirdly*, Lay before you the grounds and reasons of meekness under affliction, and of resignation to the will of God. *Fourthly*, Specify some of those particular situations which call forth the exertion of this amiable spirit. And,

Lastly, Direct your minds to a practical improvement of this subject.

I. I begin, then, by briefly describing this amiable temper. And,

1. The least degree of it, is that which David exemplifies, when he says, "I was dumb, and opened not my mouth, because thou didst it (a)." The chastisements of God must, at least, be received in humble silence. We have no right to murmur or complain. It is meet that we lay our hand upon our mouth, and our mouth in the dust, if we cannot open it to the glory of God; as Aaron did, of whom it is said, when his two sons were slain by fire from heaven, that he held his peace. This I call the least degree of resignation; because,

2. The heart, as well as the mouth, must be silent before God. It is of little importance to guard our lips, if we secretly entertain discontent in our minds. Our inward tempers must be resigned and composed, no less than our outward behaviour. Our very hearts must consent to whatever is done by the great Father of our spirits; and no objection must be listened to against the wisdom or righteousness of any of his dealings. But further,

3. We must consent to the divine procedure, and acquiesce in it as good, because it is the will of God. Of this acquiescence, we have an instance in Hezekiah, who, when the prophet intimated to him the awful sentence that was gone forth against his family, replied, "Good is the word of the Lord which thou hast spoken (b):" not only just, but good. Our submission must not be like that of a slave to an arbitrary master, but like that of a child to a wise and good parent. For God is not glorified, till the will acquiesce in the dispensation, and receive it as a medicine for curing the inward distempers of the soul. Such was the temper of David, when he thus expresses himself, "I know, O Lord, that thy judge-
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(a) Ps. xxxiii.

(b) Is. xxxix. 8.

"ments are right, and that in faithfulness thou hast afflicted me." To suffer quietly, because we cannot help it, is the resignation of a Heathen, but not of a Christian. Resignation is founded on two things; a conviction, that God is just when he afflicts us, and a persuasion, that the affliction which he sends, is intended for our benefit. Hence it follows,

4. That our submission will be accompanied with love to God, and a disposition to praise him amidst all our trials. We are commanded to love our enemies, even at the time when they are intending our hurt; and seeing they are only our fellow-creatures, and, as such, we can have little or no dependance upon them, how much more are we bound to love God, who only appears to be our enemy, and corrects us, not for his own pleasure, but for our profit, that so we may partake of his resemblance. It was a noble resolution of David's, "I will bless the Lord at all times: his praise shall continually be in my mouth (c)." And we have a beautiful example of the same disposition in Job; "Naked," says he, "came I out of my mother's womb, and naked will I return: The Lord gave, and the Lord taketh away; blessed be the name of the Lord."

5. Upon this head, I shall only add, that this must be our general temper at all times, and in all conditions. Our obedience must be universal no less in suffering, than in action. As it is not lawful to object to any duty, so, neither is it to remonstrate against any affliction. In both cases, the will of God must be cheerfully submitted to, without exception, and without limitation. They who pretend to choose their own rod, do not submit to God, but to themselves. It is not a cup of our own preparing, but that which our Father gives us, that we are commanded to drink. But we must not only be content to endure our present trials, but refer ourselves entirely unto God for the future; being ready, as Paul says of himself, not only to be bound, but to die for the

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name of Jesus ; and, adopting the language of David, when driven from his throne, by his unnatural son, " Behold, here I am ; let the Lord do unto me, as " seemeth good in his sight."

Thus I have explained the nature and extent of genuine submission to the will of God.

II. I now come, *2dly*, To lay before you, the deformity and sinfulness of the opposite temper ; and this will appear, if we consider,

1. That it is in some measure a practical denial of the sovereignty of God. May not the potter do with his clay what he pleases ? Hath not He, who made us, a right to dispose of us ; to allot us our station and circumstances in the world, and to mingle our cup with what ingredients he thinks proper ? Impatience, on the other hand, is calling this in question ; saying, that God is unjust, and usurping a power that does not belong to him. It would be difficult, I believe, to interpret it in any other way. And surely, in this view, it must be an offence highly aggravated.

2. It supposes a mean opinion of the wisdom, or, at least, a great distrust of the goodness of God. He who believes that God does all things in perfect wisdom, will surely acquiesce in the dispensations of his providence, however dark and inexplicable they may, in the mean time, seem to be. And he who is perfectly convinced of the goodness of God, whatever be his present feelings, will still hold to this conclusion, That the Father of mercies does all things well ; and will therefore be ready to say, that not only just, but good, is the will of God. Whereas, he who repines under distress, discovers that he considers it as improperly inflicted, or else he considers God as a rigid and a cruel Being who delights in punishing, though he has expressly declared, that he does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men.

3. It betrays too great an attachment to some present enjoyment, which is absolutely inconsistent with
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that supreme love which we owe to God. This attachment must be the foundation of all our complaints. For, did we not pay a greater regard to our health, riches, honours, and friends, than to God, we should more readily part with them, when He, in his providence, is pleased to call them from us. Besides, it affords great reason to suspect, that we have not been duly concerned to secure an interest in the friendship of God, in the redemption of Jesus Christ, and in that covenant, of which he is Mediator. A man will not grieve much for the loss of a trifle, who has a great estate in reserve: nor will he be greatly disquieted about an earthly loss, who can say, that God is his everlasting portion, and that his treasure is in heaven, where neither moth nor rust can corrupt, nor thieves break through and steal. But,

4. Impatience denotes ingratitude and unthankfulness to God for all his benefits. Where is the man whose distress is so pure and unmixed, that he cannot find out any good thing in his lot? Or, rather, where is the man, the portion of whose happiness is not greater than that of his misery? Without entering minutely into this comparison, may we not all profit by the word of God? Have we not free access, if it is not our own fault, to the ordinances of religion? Are not Christ and eternal salvation in our offer? and can any temporal inconvenience be put in the balance against these? How ungrateful is it, then, to confine our attention to some affliction in our lot, which must soon end, and which one moment's enjoyment of heaven will for ever blot from our remembrance! Besides, do you owe to God no acknowledgement for the former possession of those very things, the loss of which you now regret? Should not your former enjoyments enter into your consideration, and the recollection of the blessings of providence, prevent your ingratitude? But,

Lastly, Impatience is chargeable with all the guilt of hypocrisy. Say, have you not often confessed yourselves

yourselves to be sinners? Is not this the daily language of your prayers, that if God should mark iniquity, you could not stand; that it is solely owing to his tender mercy that you are not consumed; and that it is, because his compassion has not failed, that your portion is not already fixed with those impure spirits, who are for ever secluded from the seats of the blessed? And is it likely that you are sincere in these confessions, while you yet murmur, on account of some afflictions in your present lot? No; so long as you complain of the dispensations of unerring Providence, your confessions, with however much humility expressed, proceed only from the lips; and the heart is tinctured with pride.

Thus, then, impatience appears to be a heinous sin; offensive in the sight of God; and, unless repented of, and forsaken, must be severely punished.

III. We proceed, *3dly*, To explain the grounds, and reasons of resignation under affliction. And,

1. We may take notice of the usefulness of affliction in general. In this world, we are but as pilgrims and sojourners, and yet, by reason of the corruption of our nature, and our strong attachment to the objects of sense, we are too apt to make it our resting-place. We therefore stand in need of some friendly monitor to induce us to pursue our journey: and, when every other mean fails, God, in mercy, visits us with trouble, in order effectually to convince us, that this earth cannot be our home; and to raise our desires to our Father's house, where there is fulness of joy, and pleasures for evermore. It is a dangerous error, to mistake earth for heaven: and, yet, how common is the mistake! Tell a man who enjoys abundance of the good things of this life; tell him, that this earth is not his home, that he has more important concerns to which he should attend; and though he be ashamed, in express words, to contradict you, yet his practice shews how little he regards
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your admonition. Present ease and pleasure have powerful charms; and if God did not sometimes put thorns into our beds, we would be in danger of sleeping out our time. But, when affliction comes, it speaks convincingly, and it will be heard. Should we then murmur at afflictions which are sent for so kind a purpose? Surely it becomes us rather to submit to them with cheerfulness, and improve them for the purposes for which they were designed.

2. It ought to be observed, that, for the most part, it is the body only which suffers in affliction, unless we, by our impatience, open a passage for it into the soul. And, surely, we need not grieve so deeply for the sufferings of that part of our nature, which is both the instrument and the inlet of all that sin which brings our misery upon us. In most of the diseases incident to human nature, the soul is free, if we do not willingly afflict it. Why, then, should this mouldering tabernacle, be so precious in our sight? Is it not our prison? Should we grieve, because our prison-walls are coming down? The body, indeed, is subservient to the great interests of the soul; and, in that point of view, must not be neglected. But, if God sees proper to chastise it, on account of its rebellion against himself, and our own souls; shall we take the part of the flesh, against our great Creator, and provoke him to deliver them both up to more severe affliction?

3. You should consider, that these very afflictions that give you the greatest uneasiness, may possibly be sent by God, in answer to your own prayers. And surely, in this case, we ought to receive them, not only with submission, but gratitude. Say, have you not often made this your request to God, that he would keep you from sin; that he might discover to you the vanity of this world, and all its enjoyments; that he would subdue your inward corruptions, and take full possession of your heart? And is not affliction as likely to be the means which God will employ to accomplish these ends, as any other? You wish to be kept
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from sin ; and what mean is so proper, as to hedge in your way with afflictions ? Do you wish to see the vanity of this world ? Affliction not only makes you see, but feel, its vanity, in that vexation of spirit which attends it. What so proper to subdue your evil affections, as to take away the fuel that maintains them ? Can any thing be better calculated than afflictions, to dispossess those idols that kept your hearts from God, and which nothing less than their destruction could prevail with you to forsake ? And will you, notwithstanding, murmur and repine ? Can any thing be more disingenuous than such a conduct ? If God delays to answer your prayers, you complain as as if he did not regard your cry ; and when he does answer them in the way he sees most proper, you mistake his meaning, and pervert that into poison which was intended for your good.

Let me ask you, Are you willing to have your whole portion upon earth, and to renounce all hopes of future felicity for present ease ? If you are not, why are you dissatisfied with the means which God employs, for fulfilling the very thing which your heart desires ? But perhaps you may say, I could have borne any affliction better than that under which I labour. If this be your language, give me leave to tell you, that this affliction you complain of, was the one you stood most in need of, and is therefore the fittest for your improvement. It appears that God has aimed at that idol, which was his chief competitor, and had the greatest influence in keeping him out of your heart. Let this then prevent your murmurings, and turn your complaints into a song of thankfulness. But, further,

4. What pretence have you to be exempt from trouble ? If you live in sin, you can meet with nothing too bad. And be assured, if you die in sin, the afflictions you now complain of are but the beginning of sorrows, and not to be compared with those endless torments which you must afterwards endure. Or, if you have happily been brought into friendship with
God,

God, which I hope is the case with many of you, will not this suffice to give you comfort amidst all your distresses? Can you distrust the wisdom of your heavenly Father, or suspect poison in the cup that comes from him? What man is there of you, whom, if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone, or, if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven, give good things to them that ask him?

Besides, affliction can be no surprise to you, since we are expressly told, that the way to the kingdom of heaven is through many tribulations; and since that covenant, which secures us against eternal misery, nowhere promises exemption from temporal afflictions; nay, assures us, that they shall not be withheld, if God sees them necessary to recal our wandering steps, or to quicken our pace to our eternal home. And here let me prevail on such as are real Christians, to reflect on the temper of their minds, when first they made choice of God, as their God in Christ. Say, was not the spirit of resignation, then, universal and complete? Did you then make an exception of any of your favourite enjoyments, of your riches, your health, or your honours? All these were, then, swallowed up in your concern for the one thing needful. When the burden of sin lay heavy on your souls, when the wrath of God, the curse of the law, and the fears of hell beset you on every side; say, how happy were you to escape that danger, had it even been with the loss of every worldly comfort? And, now that you have got a nearer prospect of heaven, do you repent the choice you have made, or think that you have purchased heaven at too great a price? You dare not; I am persuaded you do not; and yet impatience has something in it very like this. Strive then against it, and you will not find the burden so galling as it otherwise would be.

SERMON IX.

THE SAME SUBJECT CONTINUED.

P A R T II.

Psalms cxix. 75.—I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right, and that in faithfulness thou hast afflicted me.

—**B**UT, as general arguments upon any subject, however conclusive in their own nature, are frequently lost, for want of skill or care in applying them; I shall now endeavour,

IV. To specify, *Fourthly*, Some of those particular situations which call forth the exertion of this amiable spirit. And let us attend,

1. To poverty, which is, no doubt, heavier to those who have been reduced to it from a state of affluence. Yet, even here, such as attentively consider, will find many arguments against impatience. Riches do not recommend us to God, nor does poverty sink us below his notice. It is the frame and temper of the heart which God regards, and not any of those outward circumstances by which one man is raised above another. I do not mean, that riches are in themselves pernicious; they are a talent put into our hands, which, by a wise improvement, may endear us the more to God, our great Master. Neither do I mean that poverty is constantly attended with
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spiritual advantage; for a man may be poor indeed, in every sense of the word; he may be poor and wretched in this life, and miserable in the next. But the scope of my argument is to show, that neither riches nor poverty have the least connection with our happiness in a future state; and that therefore no man has any reason to complain, on account of being reduced in his circumstances in this world.

Allow me to ask you a few questions. Are you reduced through your own mismanagement? In this case, blame yourself; but do not murmur against God; for you are already liable to his displeasure, by squandering away that which should have been improved to his honour. Or, if you have been reduced to poverty by misfortune rather than imprudence, still you ought to remember that God has the disposal of your lot, whose undoubted province it is to provide for all his family, and give to every one a portion, as he sees convenient. If your former plenty was only made the instrument of luxurious and sensual enjoyment, you have no occasion to wonder that it is now taken from you. Rather wonder that God did not take you from it by a sudden death, before you had leisure to repent. But, if your conscience bear witness that you endeavoured to honour God with your substance while you had it, the sting of adversity must to you be almost extracted; and you may consider it, not as a punishment, but as a trial of your faith and submission to God. You are now cast into the furnace, that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than that of gold that perisheth, may be found to the praise and the glory of God. Our Lord proved the sincerity of the young man in the gospel, by desiring him to sell all he had, and give it to the poor. You are now brought to a similar situation. Let this, therefore, awaken your attention, lest, like him, you be found wanting, and lest your goodness, which in prosperity glittered like precious metal, should discover itself to be base and counterfeit, when brought to the touchstone.

2. Let us attend to the reproach of the world. This trial is, doubtless, a severe one; and yet, even here, there is no reason to murmur or complain. If the reproaches which we meet with are just, we ought to lament the occasion, and amend our conduct for the future. But suppose the censure altogether without foundation, may it not be permitted for wise purposes? And I am apt to believe, that false aspersions, however vexatious in the mean time to those who labour under them, are yet capable of many excellent improvements. Thus, a man who sets too high a value on the opinion and applause of his fellow-creatures, and who is ready to endeavour to attain it by indirect methods, may by this means have his eyes opened, to see the impropriety of a violent regard for the esteem of the world. It will show the necessity also of approving ourselves to God, the Witness and only infallible Judge of the characters of men. The opinions of mankind are seldom right, and always liable to abuse; nor are the friendships of the world extremely constant. The appearance of a storm may soon banish our general friends; for few have resolution to support a character which the general voice condemns: but the unchangeable God never varies in his judgment. Whom he justifies, none can condemn; and whom he loves, he loves unto the end. Besides, bearing the reproach of men, may serve to render the Redeemer more precious in our esteem. And surely we ought never to complain of any thing that may be improved to this purpose. Does reproach, does calumny, sit heavy on your mind? How much then do you owe to Christ, who, for your sake, became of no reputation, and endured the contradiction of sinners! He was accused of drunkenness, of gluttony, and many other vices; and yet, in spite of all, persisted in his gracious design of saving a lost and ruined world. What an admirable opportunity then are they favoured with, of increasing in love and gratitude to their
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great Redeemer, who find reproach sitting heavy on their minds!

3. Let us attend to the loss of dear and valuable friends. This is an affliction, under which, to a certain degree, we may, with propriety, indulge our feelings. When we reflect on our former happiness in the society of our friends, on the agreeable moments we have spent together, and on all those obliging offices which render their memory dear to us; and are obliged to conclude all with this melancholy reflection, that now they are for ever gone, never, never to return to this earth again: O, what regret, what bitter affliction must distress the soul! Affliction, indeed, the more excessive, because it can never be relieved. Yet, this is not sin; humanity calls for tears; religion does not forbid them: Jesus wept at the grave of Lazarus. But beware that your sorrow does not exceed its bounds; remember it is the doing of the Lord. Let your tears then run in another channel; and mourn not so much for your sufferings, as for sin, which brought death into the world. And if it appear so terrible, in the loss of one friend, how much more dreadful must it appear, when you consider that it could provoke the merciful God to subject all his creatures to the King of terrors. This is the proper improvement of every dispensation of this kind. We should view the cause in the effects, and then we would discover, that it is not death, but sin, that is our enemy: and the greater enemy, on this account, that it not only separates our friends from us, but, if not repented of, if not forgiven, will eternally separate us from God, our best friend; "for evil cannot dwell with him, and he abhorreth all the workers of iniquity." Happy would it be, if we could convert these mournful occasions into opportunities of such wholesome instruction. Happy, if, instead of vainly wishing back our friends to us, we would, by a careful imitation of whatever was excellent in their character, study so to live, that we may at last attain to the hap-

pinels which they now enjoy; and that thus we may be enabled to glorify our great Redeemer, who was the plague of death, and the destruction of the grave; who, by his death, conquered him that had the power of death; and, after having consecrated the grave by his own precious body, rose as the First Fruits of them that live, and is now gone before, to prepare a place for all his saints.

4. Let us attend to sickness or distress of body. Sickness is a hardship of our own procuring; a hardship which had never been inflicted, had we never sinned. Let us therefore justify God, and turn the complaint against our own folly. Joseph's brethren argued justly, when they said, "We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul when he besought us, and we would not hear; therefore hath this distress come upon us (a)." In like manner, let us reflect upon our conduct, and we will see that we have cause with them to say that we have suffered justly, nay, that the punishment is less than our iniquity deserved.

Besides, can we not perceive the wise and gracious design of God in those pains with which he afflicts our bodies? Sin made its entrance by the senses into the soul. God therefore, in his infinite wisdom and mercy, expels it, the same way by which it came in, and makes the same passage the entrance for repentance. Pleasure deceives the sinner; and what can be more proper to undeceive him than pain? Had we been in the same distress when we were subjected to temptation, how easily had that temptation been resisted? And surely this is sufficient reason for our bearing affliction, not only with patience, but gratitude.

Consider, farther, what the imputation of sin alone cost the Redeemer. He was in himself holy, harmless, and undefiled. And let me ask you, Were any sorrows like unto his sorrows, wherewith the Lord afflicted

afflicted him in the day of his fierce anger? Yet he bore all with the greatest resignation. "He was oppressed, yet he opened not his mouth. He was brought as a lamb to the slaughter; and yet, as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth." And shall we, who, both by nature and by practice, are the children of disobedience, complain, because we receive some temporal correction from our Father in heaven? Think of this, and then turn your impatience into indignation against those sins which are the cause of your suffering. Afflictions will fit easy upon you, when once you are free from the burden of sin. Saul, you may suppose, rejoiced more when he was bound in fetters, than when his persecuting zeal was carrying him to Damascus. Remember, the way that leadeth to destruction is broad and easy; but the road to your Father's house is through many tribulations: and therefore you should bless the Lord, who, by your temporal sufferings, is calling upon you to make sure of everlasting rest: and let it be your principal care to convert your bodily affliction into medicine, for the health of your soul.

5. Let us attend, *Fifthly*, to the apprehensions of approaching death. Sickness and pain are borne by many, who would shrink at the thoughts of dissolution. While there are any hopes of a recovery, they have still some comfort; but, when these are taken away by unquestionable symptoms of a fatal distemper, they impiously give way to anguish and impatience. Now, to correct this criminal weakness, give me leave to propose to you a few questions. Have you not always known that you were to die? Has not this been the universal fate of mankind? Why then do you complain of what you knew was to come to pass? Would any of you, if left to his own choice, really wish to live perpetually on this earth, where there is nothing but a return of the same pleasures? Would you not all wish to attain the greatest perfection of your existence, to get rid of every in-

cumbrance that now mars the activity of your soul, your better part, your true self? And who is ignorant that the way to this liberty lies through the dark valley of death; and that the present frame of his body must be broken down and dissolved, before it can be raised a spiritual and glorious body? Are sickness, pain, death, and old age, preferable to uninterrupted health and perpetual youth? Is the company of sinful men to be compared with the company of God, of Jesus Christ, of angels, and the spirits of just men made perfect? Yet, who does not know that this great and unspeakable happiness is only to be enjoyed in a future state, after death has loosed the bonds that unite us to this earth?

But some of you, perhaps, are saying, "If we
" were certain that the change would be so much to
" our advantage, we could have no reason to be un-
" easy at the thoughts of death; but that is altoget-
" her uncertain: and the fearful prospect of the
" consequences of death make us tremble to think of
" the great alteration." God forbid that I should publish a false peace to any of you. Perhaps your fears are better founded than you yourselves imagine. The only advice, then, that I can give you, is, to let your present fears instantly push you on to their only cure. Repent of your sins, that brought death into the world. Betake yourselves to Him, who is the way, the truth, and the life; and then your fears will be converted into the assurance of salvation, and fervent desires of being for ever with the Lord. But if you have already attained to this happy assurance, and if your reluctance proceeds from natural infirmity, and a gloominess of thought, to which you cannot give a name; let me advise you to check, as much as possible, all desponding thoughts, and banish them from your imagination. If faith and reason unite, in telling you that death will introduce you to a far happier state, and that you are abundantly safe in the hands of the Redeemer; then, shut your eyes against those unknown circumstances that take advantage of your
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your weakness, and turn your thoughts to some subject more adapted to increase your satisfaction and peace. You look, perhaps, on your decaying body; but surely its joys and yours are not essentially connected. When the body is decayed in the grave, the soul shall flourish in immortal vigour. Let this fact then be present with your minds; and especially let me persuade you to commit your parting souls to Christ, and pray for his grace to strengthen your faith, to enliven your hope, so that you may depart in peace, and be eternally with the Lord.

I shall now conclude with a few practical directions.

1. It is necessary to seek an interest in the friendship of God, by a cordial acceptance of the Lord Jesus Christ, the only Mediator between God and man. I begin here, because, till this is done, all the other directions that I, or any man in the world, can give, will prove useless. Wicked men, through stupidity, may bear adversity with a seeming composure; but I do not hesitate to affirm, that no man can be resigned, who is not a Christian indeed: for it is impossible that our minds can be formed to a rational submission to the will of God, till once we are assured of his friendship; till we are persuaded that he means to bring us to happiness at last; and that all his proceedings are calculated to promote this end. Now, the principal thing being thus secured, having fled to Christ for refuge;—it will be of use,

2. To keep your eyes constantly fixed upon God himself and to consider every stroke of adversity as of his appointment, whatever instruments are used to bring it about. We are frequently in danger of fretting against our fellow-creatures for evils that befall us. But when we consider them only as instruments in the hand of God, we will say, as David did to his men, when they wanted him to slay Shimei for cursing him, "Let him alone, let him alone; it is the Lord that hath commanded him."

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3. We should lay our account with changes, and beware of entertaining the hopes of a long tract of uninterrupted prosperity. Foreseen evils are easiest borne; but, when unprepared for them, we are ready to add to our own distress, and to repine at the providence of God.

4. Get your hearts weaned from all earthly enjoyments. Believe it, we lay in a great store for future trials, when we suffer our hearts to grow too fond of any thing here below. It is good, therefore, to hearken to the advice given us in the word of God, "to weep, as if we wept not; to rejoice, as if we rejoiced not; to buy, as though we possessed not; and to use this world, as not abusing it; for the fashion thereof passeth away."

Lastly, Frequent prayer is an excellent mean, both of attaining and improving this gracious disposition. To this the Spirit of God directs us by the apostle James, "Is any among you afflicted, let him pray (a)." By means of prayer, we disburden our hearts to God, and obtain those supplies of grace, which alone can render us superior to all the troubles of life, and enable us to improve them to the glory of God, and our own spiritual advantage.

Let us then be careful for nothing; but in every thing, by prayer and supplication, make our requests known unto God. And thus the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

(a) Ja. v. 13.

SERMON X.

DEATH THE TERMINATION OF TEMPORAL ENJOYMENT.

PART I.

Job. xiv. 10.—*Man dieth, and wasteth away : yea, man
giveth up the ghost, and where is he ?*

THAT we must all die, is a fact so known and certain, that, at first view, one would think no man needed to be reminded of it. None are so ignorant or vain, as to promise themselves an immortality on earth ; and, however different their course and station of life may be, yet all expect to be lodged at last in the house of mourning, in the solitary grave ; for that, they know, is appointed for all men.

But although this truth be obvious, and universally acknowledged, yet the far greater part of mankind seldom think of death ; and much less frequently do they make those instructive reflections on it, which a subject of this importance should require. All of us need a monitor, to proclaim in our ears, with an audible and awakening voice, “ Remember, man, “ that thou must die.” And the most of us need to be taught and directed, to what excellent purposes
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our meditations on this solemn and awful subject should be improved.

It is to assist you in such reflections, that I have chosen this passage of scripture; "Man dieth, and wasteth away; yea, man giveth up the ghost, and where is he?"

From the beginning of this chapter, to the 7th verse, Job gives us a lively and affecting view of the shortness of life, and the miseries that replenish it. In the 7th, 8th, and 9th verses, he compares the death of a man to the cutting down of a tree; and shews that, the latter, in some respects, has the advantage of the former. "For there is hope of a tree, "if it be cut down, that it will sprout again, and "that the tender branch thereof will not cease. "Though the root thereof wax old in the earth, "and the stock thereof die in the ground: yet, "through the scent of water, it will bud, and bring "forth boughs like a plant. But man dieth, and "wasteth away; yea, man giveth up the ghost, and "where is he?" The rational soul, whenever it retires from the body, is too great, too noble a thing, to be recalled by any of the powers of Nature; the sun or the rain cannot affect it; nor can it be restored to the body, except by the immediate operations of the Almighty. Man dieth, and man giveth up the ghost. The first word translated Man, signifies, in the original language, a great and mighty man; the second, signifies a poor or mean man; plainly intimating, that death makes no distinction; that it enters into the palaces of the great, as well as the cottages of the poor. The mighty cannot resist its force; the treasures of the rich cannot bribe its delay; there is no discharge in that war, neither shall wickedness deliver those that are given to it.

"Man dieth." This is a general account of that great change we must all undergo. The expression is awful and solemn; an expression that should humble the pride of man, and hide vanity from his eyes. It is added, "he wasteth away," or, as the word may be rendered,

dered, "he is cut off." The original language allows it to be taken in both senses; and the meaning is, that some waste away, and decay gradually, through languishing sickness and pain; while others are snatched away in a moment, perhaps in the vigour of their strength, and the bloom of their years; and, in both cases, they are cut off from this world and all its enjoyments. It is subjoined, "man giveth up the ghost;" which some translate, "his breath departeth;" his organs of life cease to operate; and though it be true that this happens when men die, yet, there is a much more important truth contained in this expression. "He giveth up the ghost;" that is, he giveth up, or surrenders his soul or spirit, which is the true signification of the word Ghost, in scripture: and this represents death to us in another light, namely, as it is a separation between the soul and the body. Then follows that solemn question in the end of the verse, "And where is he?" By this question, Job does not suppose that the soul was annihilated by death; for the former expression, as we have explained it, proves the contrary; and he declares his belief in a future state, in many passages of this book. But when the body is buried in the grave, and becomes the food of corruption, who can tell what becomes of the soul? It takes its flight into an invisible world; and who can, with any certainty, determine its fate there? Who can positively say, concerning this or that particular person; where he is? And indeed it is a very awful consideration to think where they are who have given up the ghost, and where we ourselves shall be, when we shall go into eternity.

The words thus explained, represent death to us in three points of view, each of them full of instruction, and infinitely important. *First*, As it cuts us off from the world, and all its enjoyments: *Secondly*, As it is a separation of the soul from the body: and, *Thirdly*, As it is the passage to a new and unknown state. These I shall endeavour to illustrate, and lead your thoughts to a practical improvement of each.

I. Let

I. Let us consider death, as it cuts us off from the world, and all its enjoyments.

It is the conclusion of human life, which shuts up its transitory scenes, and hurries the actors from the stage. As, in the midnight hour, an entire stop is put to the labour of the day, and all things seem to be wrapt up in silence and obscurity; so, when death hath overtaken us, all the actions and enjoyments of this life entirely cease; all the momentary affairs and pleasures of it are past and gone for ever. But, more particularly,

1. Death cuts off the mighty from their honours: "Man," says the Psalmist, "being in honour, abideth not, but is like the beasts that perish; for when he dieth, he shall carry nothing away: his glory shall not descend after him, nor his honour into the grave." They that are now surrounded with multitudes of guards and attendants; that command great armies and mighty kingdoms; in a little their honour shall be laid in the dust: And when they come to this house appointed for all living, the meanest of their subjects shall be on the same level. Honour and preferment make a great noise in the world. How many court them! How are they envied, who possess a distinguished rank among men! How many arts must be practised to acquire and preserve it! What importance do men assume! What homage do they expect from all who crowd around them! And yet, in a little time, death will lay them in the grave with the meanest of the people. No marks of their former power and greatness, appear in their ghastly remains; but all lie down alike in the dust, and become the food of corruption and of worms. The good order, indeed, and government of the world, require, that those who are in possession of honour, should be respected: but it concerns them to remember, that they will soon be undistinguished in the grave, and their dust mingle with common dust. What, then, is human greatness? A shining meteor, a painted cloud, which being raised out of the ground, will soon fall back to it again.

2. Death

2. Death cuts us off from the wealth and possessions of this world : " Wise men die," says the Psalmist, " likewise the fool and the brutish person perish, and leave their wealth to others." Men rise up early, and watch to a late hour ; they are full of anxiety and care ; some, that they may enlarge their treasures, and others, that they may procure the necessary supports of life : but, in a little, they must go down to the silent grave, and whose shall those things be ? While the man of the world is employed with the greatest anxiety in adding house to house, and field to field ; in preserving and increasing his stores ; death, in a moment, puts an end to his busy cares ; it tears him from all his beloved treasures ; and he that, a little before, was grasping at vast possessions, must now take up for his mansion, a solitary cave in the dust of the earth. Riches, acquired by the most honourable means, are vain and unavailing to the man who lies at the point of death. If they are the fruits of oppression or of avarice, they are a heavy load on his conscience.

3. Death cuts us off from all those pleasures and amusements of life, which are confined to the body, and of a sensual nature. These are so delusive to many, that their whole lives are spent in the pursuit of them. The whole, or at least the greater part of their time, is consumed on sinful pleasures, or, at best, on vain and idle amusements. But death will soon put an end to all these. The sons and daughters of pleasure may, for a while, indulge in carnal joy, and pass a few days, perhaps years, in dissipation and vanity ; nay, they may, with Solomon, eagerly pursue all the delights of the sons of men, and not withhold their hearts from any joy : But, in a little, and they know not how soon, their eyes will be closed in darkness, and nothing remain of their former pleasures, but the painful remembrance of their guilt and folly. In a word, they may now spend their days in the excess of mirth and riot ; but,

in a moment they go down to the grave, and rest in that dark and silent abode. "Thy pomp," says the prophet Isaiah, "is brought down to the grave, and the noise of thy viols; the worm is spread under thee, and the worms cover thee."

4. Death cuts us off from our best and dearest friends; from our nearest and most beloved relations. Friendship, when rightly placed, and founded in virtue, is one of the most innocent and agreeable enjoyments of human life. It is that point, where mutual confidence and mutual intercourse are fully established; and, whether it be founded on the similarity of temper and manners, or arise naturally from the connections of life, and the habits of giving and receiving assistance, it soothes the heart of man, and promotes the amiable feelings of human nature. But, whatever pleasure we now enjoy in the conversation or correspondence of our friends, death will soon tear us from their tenderest embraces, and send us to that place of solitude and darkness, where, as Hezekiah says, we shall behold man no more, with the inhabitants of the world. The God of nature has implanted, in the breasts of near relations, a tender love to each other; as, that of husbands and wives, of parents and children. But the inexorable hand of death breaks asunder these natural ties. It snatches the beloved wife from the arms of her disconsolate husband, and tears the smiling infant from the bosom of its weeping mother. How vain, then, how empty and insufficient are our dearest comforts! and what little reason have we to set our hearts upon them!

Lastly, Death cuts us off from all the seasons of grace, and advantages we now enjoy. We have many precious opportunities put into our hands; our lot is cast in an age of light and knowledge; we are planted in the courts of the Lord, and under the dews of heaven. But death will soon put an end to all those advantages. Our day of grace cannot be
lengthened

lengthened beyond the limits of our natural life. Death will soon put to silence the most faithful preachers, or stop your ears from hearing the joyful sound of the gospel. There are no offers of mercy; no tenders of life and salvation, beyond the grave. As soon as you enter the silent house, your place is fixed for eternity; you must then hear, and read, and pray no more. Your employment, then, is rapturous praise, or unceasing and unavailing lamentation.

Thus, I have endeavoured to give you a view of death, as it cuts us off from the world and all its enjoyments. Let us now attend to the improvement we ought to make of these observations.

1. They should teach us not to set too high a value on the honours, and riches, and pleasures of this life. Wise men esteem those things most, which are most lasting and permanent. But there is nothing in this world lasting and permanent. The world, and the fashion of it, pass away. God indeed allows us to value the things of this world; but still in subordination to himself, and the concerns of his glory. Let us never, then, prefer the vanities which perish, to the interest of our souls; or lay them in the balance with the things of eternity. Again,

2. From this subject, we should learn, not to allow our thoughts and our time to be too much occupied with the enjoyments of this world. What our Saviour says concerning the necessities of life, may, with equal justice, be applied to the superfluities of it. "Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; or for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?" It is indeed astonishing, to see how busy, how anxious, how indefatigable some men are in heaping up the wealth of this world; others, in grasping at its honours; and not a few, in projecting the gratification of sensual appetites alone. One would be apt to think, they

did not at all believe in their separation from those enjoyments. But, how soon will death spread darkness over the visionary scene, and demonstrate the folly of their imaginary prospects !

3. This subject should teach us to be moderate in the enjoyment of those blessings which God, in his providence, has been pleased to allow us. Those who are prosecuting an important journey, do not stop to examine every beautiful prospect, nor load themselves with any thing which will retard their progress, and be useless at the end of it. Our existence in this world, is a journey from earth to heaven. The true Christian is crucified to the world, and the world to him. You must disengage your hearts not only from the sinful pleasures, but from the lawful enjoyments of this life. Although you have enlarged your barns, and multiplied your possessions ; though you have amassed more wealth than you can employ, and are eager in the pursuit of many pleasures ; yet, carry this reflection along with you, that this very night thy soul may be required of thee. Happy, indeed, is the man, happy the Christian, who can say, when the summons of removal is put into his hands : " Fare-
" well, vain world ; I leave thee with peace, and re-
" signation of mind. Though I have lived in thee, I
" never placed my happiness in any thing thou couldst
" afford ; and now I can cast thee off with as great
" ease, as a man does his garment when he lies down
" to sleep."

Lastly, Since death cuts us off from this world and all its enjoyments, let us, while we possess them, make them subservient to the glory of God, and the everlasting interest of our souls in a future world. If God has given you more honour than others, employ it in advancing religion, in encouraging piety ; and, in another world, God will put upon you more abundant honour. If he has added wealth to your cup of blessing, relieve your brethren in distress. Cast your bread upon the waters, and you shall find
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it after many days; for he that hath pity on the poor, lendeth to the Lord. In a word, whatsoever your hand findeth to do, for the glory of God, and the good of others, do it with all your might; for there is no work, nor device, nor wisdom, nor knowledge in the grave, whither we are all hastening.

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SERMON XI.

DEATH THE SEPARATION OF THE SOUL
FROM THE BODY.

P A R T II.

Job xiv. 10.—*Man dieth, and wasteth away; yea, man
giveth up the ghost, and where is he?*

—**D**EATH is justly styled the King of Terrors. There is a natural fear of death in every living creature. Even those which want reason, and the death of which puts an end to their existence, have a strong aversion to dissolution. Instinct teaches the beasts to fly from it. But there is far greater reason for mankind, who are endowed with immortal souls, to be afraid of death: for it does not put an end to their being, as it does in the case of brutes; it only changes the manner of their existence. This horror of death is so deeply rooted in the human mind, that the greater part of men would rather choose to continue a life of poverty and want, of sickness and pain, than desire its termination. There is something so terrible in the apprehension of death, that nature recoils, and starts back at the thought. The prospect of dissolution suggests to the mind many important reflections. We are not only cut off from all our dearest enjoyments, but we are separated.

rated from a part of ourselves; and, what remains, must launch out into a new and unknown state.

II. This separation of the soul from the body is the *second* view of death which the text gives us;—
“Yea, man giveth up the ghost.”

I will not take up your time in demonstrating, that there is a principle in man distinct from the body, and endowed with nobler powers. This fact was acknowledged by the Heathens; it is capable of being proved by reason; it is confirmed by experience; and it is put beyond all question by the scriptures of truth. I have only to explain the view of death here given us.

It is the dissolution of that union which subsists between the soul and body. It unties the knot, so to speak, on which our present animal life depends. We have no reason to think, indeed, that the essential life of our nobler part is hereby extinguished; nay, we have the clearest proof to the contrary. The soul is an immortal principle, that never dies. That diviner breath does not expire when the breath of our nostrils goes forth. Yet, if we consider human nature, as it is now compounded of soul and body, death may, in some sense, be accounted the destruction of it, as it reduces all that is visible of man to deplorable ruins. It tears down our earthly tabernacles, curiously framed by infinite wisdom; and renders them unfit for the rational soul to lodge and act in any more. And now, that person, whom we beheld a little before so vigorous and active, so full of busy thoughts and restless ambition, becomes to our view an inanimated lump, devoid of sense and of motion. That body, which was so exactly proportioned in all its parts, so fondly cherished, and which occupied so much of our attention, is now left a hideous and ghastly spectacle, and so offensive, that we are obliged to hide it from the eyes of the living, and commit it to the cold and silent grave. Such is the visible contempt that death pours upon human nature;

ture; such the dark and black cloud, it draws over all its beauty and its glory. "If I wait," says Job, "the grave is my house; I have made my bed in the darkness; I have said to corruption, Thou art my father; to the worm, Thou art my mother, and my sister. Then does the dust return to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it."

I acknowledge, indeed, that we are not able to show how the vital union is dissolved by death, and the unwelcome separation made. None of those numberless spirits, that have been dislodged from the body, ever came to inform us what it is to die: only, from daily experience, we know, that death, in its near approaches, offers considerable violence to our nature; and this union is seldom dissolved without sharp and violent conflicts. Hence we so often read and hear of the pangs of death; and hence, when we attend the beds of our dying friends, what deep groans have we not sometimes heard! What painful struggles, when the summons of removal was put into their hands, and the soul, as it were, torn from its intimate companion! In some few, indeed, the spark of life does almost insensibly expire, like a taper, whose light goes gently out. But there are innumerable other instances, which give death a frightful aspect even to good men themselves, and represent him as the king of terrors. Hear to this purpose Hezekiah's mournful complaint. "He will cut me off with pining sickness; from day, even to night, wilt thou make an end of me. I reckoned till morning, that, as a lion, so will he break all my bones (a)."

Such, then, is death, when we view it in itself, as a separation of the soul from the body. Such is the dismal ruin it brings upon our meaner part: and, with respect to the soul, it is its last farewell to this world, never again to return to the low pursuits of an animal life. "For, as the cloud is consumed, and vanisheth away, so, he that goeth down to
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" the grave, shall come up no more: He shall re-
" turn no more to his house, neither shall his place
" know him any more."

I shall now suggest a few practical reflections on this second view of death.

What humble sentiments should we entertain of ourselves, when we consider, that, in a few years, we shall be laid in the grave! How effectually should this hide pride from our eyes! What has man to foster pride, who carries about with him such arguments and motives to humility? Should *he* boast of his noble blood, and dignified ancestors, who may say to corruption, Thou art my father? Why should any glory in the beauty and strength of their bodies, when, in a very little time, they will be defaced by the hand of death, and crumble into dust? " Their beauty," says the Psalmist, " shall consume " in the grave from their dwelling." In the grave, there is no distinction between the remains of a prince, and the ashes of a peasant. The rich and the poor, the ignorant and the learned, the proud and the humble, enemies and friends, lie down together. Let these reflections, by the blessing of God, cure us of pride and ambition.

Again: This subject should teach us, not to be oversolicitous about the concerns of the body. Many take more care of the tottering house, which is ready every moment to moulder into dust, than of the precious and immortal being which inhabits it. How often do these questions, What shall I eat? what shall I drink? and wherewithal shall I be clothed? supersede another, of infinitely more importance; What shall I do to be saved? We are anxiously concerned to keep up the battered cottage, while yet the valuable inhabitant is left to bleed to death of his wounds, unheeded and disregarded. We care for the body, which, in a little, we must put off by death; and we neglect the eternal happiness of our immortal and better part. This is just as if a man should take
care

care to preserve his garments, while he took none to save his life: or, as if he should be very solicitous to secure the casket, while the jewel is cast away. O! that we would seriously reflect on the unaccountable madness and folly we are guilty of, in chiefly caring for the body, which shall soon be thrown aside as an useless lump, and disregarding the soul, the only part of us which shall then survive! This is an instance of stupidity or madness, which no words are sufficient to express, nor tears to deplore.

Another thing we may learn from this view of death, is the inestimable dignity and worth of the soul. It continues to exist, unextinguished, after the separation from the body. Hence the apostle Paul, speaking of his own death, calls it the time of his departure; and, in the text, it is represented as a giving up the ghost or spirit. The body, indeed, is reduced to its first principles; but the soul, being uncompounded, a thinking spiritual substance, cannot suffer dissolution. "The dust returns to the earth as it was; but the spirit returns to God who gave it." There is no argument more effectual to inspire us with a true sense of religion, than a just estimation of the dignity and worth of the soul; and there is no period of the soul's duration, which places this in so strong a light, as the period of its separation from the body. The beautiful structure of the body is then taken to pieces; its animal life and powers expire; it crumbles into dust, and is preyed upon by the vilest reptiles: But the soul, remains unshaken, and unhurt; all the attacks of the king of terrors cannot destroy it; and the only effect that death has, is to make it change its habitation. And therefore,

In the *last* place, this shows us, that our chief care, and most serious thoughts; our most precious moments, and greatest application; should be employed about our heaven-born and immortal souls. Since we all acknowledge, that the soul is infinitely more valuable than the body, let us think of beautify-
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ing and adorning it. This is an exercise worthy of a rational being. Now, the soul is adorned by knowledge, especially of divine things. Let us therefore labour to know God, the perfection of beauty and love. Let us contemplate his works; let us meditate on his word; and, chiefly, let us study to know God as, in Christ, reconciling the world to himself: "For this is life eternal, to know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." Let it be our principal concern to attain that knowledge of God, and of divine things, which warms the heart, which enlightens the mind, and which sheds abroad its enlivening influence on the temper and life.

But the soul is adorned also by holy and pious dispositions; for these are the image of God, after which it was at first created. Let us therefore endeavour, through grace, to have this image, which sin has in a great measure effaced, restored to our souls; our wills conformed to the will of God, and our affections placed on noble and sublime objects, that so the graces of the Spirit may abound in us, and the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, dwell in our souls. If this be your serious concern, if this sanctifying change is wrought in you by renewing grace, and your souls made thereby like to God in holiness; when they come to leave the body, they shall not be found naked nor unfurnished, nor unfit for that state of glory and blessedness, in which alone they can be completely, and for ever happy.

SERMON XII.

DEATH THE ENTRANCE INTO AN UNTRIED
STATE.

P A R T III.

Job xiv. 10.—*Man dieth, and wasteth away; yea,
man giveth up the ghost, and where is he?*

—**I** Now proceed to the *third* view of death which the text gives us; namely, that the soul, on its separation from the body, enters into a new and unknown state.

The soul is neither reduced to nothing by death, nor is it condemned to a state of insensibility, till the resurrection. This last opinion, indeed, is what some have foolishly maintained; but, both reason and scripture, demonstrate the contrary. The very nature, and essential qualities of the human soul, require us to believe, that a being, whose powers are exerted in thinking, can never cease to think, without ceasing to be. To deprive it of thought, is to deprive it of existence; and to pretend that the soul cannot act without the body, and therefore, when in a state of separation, that it is reduced to insensibility, is false in fact; for we find, that, in a state of union, there are several of the soul's operations, such as, reflecting on its own nature and powers, and on spiritual and
divine

divine things, which have no dependence on its connection with the body. How much more, then, will it be capable of high exertion, in a state of separate existence? This is so much a fact, that it is more difficult to conceive how a spirit acts in conjunction with matter, than how it can act of itself.

But the vanity and falsehood of this opinion, of the soul's insensibility till the general resurrection, will appear beyond all contradiction, if we consider, that it is directly contrary to several passages of scripture. "Blessed are the dead," said the voice from heaven, "that die in the Lord, from henceforth;" that is, from the time of their death. Our Saviour said to the penitent thief on the cross, "This day thou shalt be with me in paradise." The apostle Paul declares his full assurance, that, when absent from the body, he would be present with the Lord: And, in another place, he expresses his belief in the same opinion, "I am in a strait between two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better (a)." Hence, also, we read of the spirits of just men made perfect, which are already with Jesus, the Mediator of the new covenant, and of multitudes of saints surrounding the throne of God and the Lamb, together with the holy angels, uniting in their songs of praise; while time is running on, and the dispensations of Providence towards our world, are working their way to the consummation of all things.

Thus, it evidently appears, both from scripture and reason, that the soul, on its separation from the body, is not reduced to a state of sleep or insensibility; but that it enters into a new and unknown world. It becomes not only an unembodied and separate spirit, disentangled from the incumbrance of an earthly tabernacle, but it enters on a new scene of life, where its spiritual powers are awakened to greater vigour and activity. But, more particularly,

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(a) Phil. i. 23.

1. The soul, on its separation from the body, removes to a new place. It passes from the narrow current of time, and launches into the untried and boundless ocean of eternity. It leaves this unsubstantial tabernacle of clay, together with this narrow spot of earth, and takes its flight into those vastly extended dominions, over which He presides, who has the keys of hell and of death. It removes from this earth, and enters into the upper or lower regions of the vast invisible world; for, no sooner is the dividing stroke given by death, and the parting struggle over, than, on the one hand, the souls of the righteous ascend into the mansions of ineffable light and glory; while, on the other hand, the souls of the wicked, are driven away by evil angels, as executioners of the divine wrath, to that place of endless torment and misery prepared for them, and there to be reserved to the judgment of the great day.

2. The soul, on its separation from the body, enters into new society and conversation. It has no longer the body, and sensible objects, to converse with; its connection with these, being dissolved by death. It removes to the world of spirits; with the manner of whose intercourse, it is wholly unacquainted. It is easy to believe, at the same time, that it is within the limits of almighty power, to establish a medium of communication between one intelligent being and another, in every possible mode of their existence. Our conjectures on this subject, must, from the darkness which covers futurity, be vague and uncertain; but our present manner of communication, the flow of reason through a material channel, is a proof of the fact; and, to unembodied spirits, unacquainted with man, it would appear a still more doubtful point, and they would be more at a loss to conjecture, in what manner the gross substance of our bodies could be employed for the purposes of reasonable communication. The soul, then, when it takes its flight from the body, must associate either with good angels, and the spirits of just men
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made perfect; or with devils, and the spirits of the damned. If it be redeemed by the blood of the Lamb, and prepared for glory, it joins the church of the First-born on high, and shares with them in their blissful communion; but if it leaves the body, unpardoned, and un sanctified, it is thrust down to the miserable society of wicked and infernal spirits, where there is nothing but weeping and wailing, and torment and destruction, from the presence of the Lord, for ever.

3. The soul, at death, enters on new employment of its active powers. In the present state, our inquiries are chiefly directed to material objects. We contemplate the perfections of God in the works of his hand, in the effects of infinite wisdom, and in the amazing productions of almighty power. But we see in part, and we know only in part. We are, as it were, confined in a dungeon, where, from a small opening, we behold the beauties of nature. Our situation in this world, fixes us down to local and selfish considerations. Our point of reasoning is so narrow, that we can come to very few general conclusions. The operations of nature and providence are partly exposed to our view; but the amazing sources of love and consolation, the general plans of wisdom and gradual perfection, lie beyond our observation. However keen we are to pry into a future state, in whatever anxious manner we endeavour to look forward, there is a veil of impenetrable obscurity which interrupts the prospect. This veil is removed by death. Those who are holy and prepared, no sooner leave the body, than they are delightfully employed in the incessant praises of God and of the Lamb, and in whatever unknown exercises may be assigned them, agreeable to their nature, and of the most noble and exalted kind. But, how different the employment of the un sanctified soul, when dislodged from the body! For, then, it reflects, with unavailing grief, and incessant self-condemnation, on its own folly and madness, while it was in the world; it

mourns under the dreadful feeling of its misery; and looks forward, with horror and despair, to those endless torments which it is doomed to suffer.

Lastly, The state, on which the soul enters at death, is unchangeable and everlasting. There is no alteration in its condition after its separation from the body; as the tree falls, so it shall lie: no repentance for the wicked after death; no retrieving of their folly; no access to the mercy of God, who then becomes their unrelenting and inexorable foe. And, with respect to the righteous, there is no falling from the possession of that happiness to which they are admitted by death. The promise of God can never fail; and the inheritance which they receive, is incorruptible, and fadeth not away. Death, in short, introduces the soul into an eternity of happiness or misery, which, when millions of ages have elapsed, will be still to begin.

These are the reflections which should occur to the mind, in considering death as the passage of the soul to an unknown and eternal state.

And now, my brethren, is it not an awful and solemn thing, to die? The obvious suggestions of reason and experience concerning it, do indeed show death to be a great and important change. If we only consider it as a dissolution of this mortal frame; if we only regard it as cutting us off from the world, and all its enjoyments; as putting an end to all our seasons of grace, and opportunities of service; even this view of death makes it a matter of infinite importance, and deserving of serious reflection. But when we look forward, and observe the vast consequences of death, in that invisible world to which it is the passage and the entrance, this gives it a far more terrible aspect, and should effectually convince us how solemn a thing it is to die. With what serious concern then should we think of our last moments, when our souls must leave the habitation of dust, and take up their everlasting abode, either in
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the heavenly paradise above, or in the place of perpetual torment? What idea have you formed of an invisible world? Whither does your conception lead you, when you reflect on destruction from the presence of the Lord, and on his favour, which is life? Eternity lies before you, and you are hastening forwards. What exemption do you claim from the dominion of the grave, and the stroke of the king of terrors? What is your opinion of an eternal world? We surely are not laying before you things doubtful in their issue, or uncertain in their operation. Since the creation of the world, vanity is written on the pride of man; and his strength, and glory, and beauty, have been laid in the dust.

Let us therefore frequently and seriously meditate on death. Without being all our lifetime subject to bondage, seeing we have a sure foundation of hope, let every ordinary occurrence, every revolution of season, and every change of circumstance, bring to our mind, that, in a short time, we must put off this tabernacle of the body, and lay it down in the grave. When we lie down to sleep, let us meditate on sleep as the image of death, and remember, that, in a few days, we must sleep in a bed of dust. When we awake, perhaps this may be the last morning we shall enjoy before that of the resurrection. Thus, even the most common and ordinary actions of our lives may be improved to remind us of death; nay, almost every thing around us, and every condition of life in which we are placed, should lead us to the same pious meditations.

When you behold the flowers of the field, you should think with the prophet, that all flesh is grass, and the goodliness thereof as the flower of the field: in the morning, it flourisheth and groweth up; in the evening, it is cut down, and withereth. Man is as vanity; his days are as a shadow that passeth away. Man's life is as the wind; a wind that passeth away, and cometh not again. When you look up to the heavens, and behold their beauty and their glory,

consider that if you be serious Christians, God hath formed you, not always to dwell on this earth, but to dwell for ever with himself in the heavenly world. If your prosperity and your family shall increase, let not this banish from your mind proper reflections on death: in a little time you must give place to your children, and leave your enjoyments to their possession. Whatever be our condition in the world, and in whatever manner we may be employed, let us lift up our hearts to God in such serious meditations as these.

But how many, instead of considering their latter end, persist in a careless and thoughtless indifference, as if this world and they were to be everlasting and inseparable companions; or, at best, as if both soul and body were to be destroyed by death! They spend their time in dissipation and vanity, in making provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts and affections thereof; but death and eternity are not in all their thoughts. How, alas! has the God of this world blinded their eyes, that the daily instances of the mortality of their fellow-creatures cannot awaken them out of this fatal lethargy! Others satisfy themselves with a few good wishes, or some superficial thoughts; but never think of making it the business of their lives to prepare for eternity. Such men labour under a gross delusion, a most miserable infatuation: for death is approaching, and every day brings you nearer to the grave; nay, you know not but it may be at the door: and yet you are unprepared for the summons, and regardless of the consequences. O, foolish men, when will you be wise? How long shall such vain thoughts lodge within you?

I beseech you, therefore, by the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, and as you value the salvation and happiness of your own souls, awake out of this fatal sleep, before your eyes be closed in darkness; and speedily begin this great and necessary work, the serious preparation for death and eternity. Of all the labour

labour which you can find to do under the sun, there is none so solemn and important as this. If you die in your sins, strangers to the Captain of your salvation, ignorant of the power of religion in the heart, in a state of nature and enmity with God, your misery will be inexpressible, and your condition hopeless for ever. But, to die in peace and friendship with God, through the blood of Jesus, and, at the close of a life of holy obedience, to die in union with Christ, and under the gracious influence of his Spirit, this is to deprive death of his sting; this is to leave a world of sin, darkness, and sorrow, and to enter into a world of immortal light and life, to be with Christ, and to behold his glory. Let not, then, the trifling affairs of this present, uncertain, and transitory life, make you forget the hour of your departure: but let it be your great concern to meditate often, and seriously, on death; and make such effectual preparation for it, as will give you hope in the prospect, and comfort in the time. And in order to this, study above all things, by serious repentance, and sincere faith in the mercy of God through Christ, to get your peace made with him, and your title to a blessed immortality secured. And, finally, let the lively views of your latter end powerfully influence you to the study and practice of holiness. Let your loins be always girt about, and your lamps burning, that you may be ready to enter in, before the door be shut. Be diligent in the improvement of the talent with which you are entrusted, for, in a very little, death will bring you that awful message, "Give an account of thy stewardship, for thou must be no longer steward." And blessed is that servant, whom his Lord, when he cometh, shall find so doing.

To conclude: Let us carefully guard against whatever may be displeasing to God, and hurtful to the peace of our own minds. And let us cultivate those graces and virtues, and be diligent in the discharge of those duties, which may make us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints. Our time of warfare

warfare and combat, of labour and suffering, will soon be over. Let us be careful to fill it up with all that fruitful service, which will render our great and final account comfortable. In a word, let us live to Christ; and then, to die, will be our unspeakable and everlasting gain. The hour of death is the hour of triumph to the Christian. In the valley and shadow of it, the rod and the staff of the Almighty, support him. When his heart and his flesh fail within him, God is the strength of his heart, and his portion for ever.

S E R-

SERMON XIII.

THE GROUNDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT UNDER
AFFLICTION STATED.

I SAMUEL xxx. 6.

But David encouraged himself in the Lord his God.

THERE is nothing that distinguishes the righteous and the wicked more plainly from one another, than the means by which they support themselves in affliction, and the methods they take to obtain relief. Wicked men, under the pressure of distress, fly to every worldly object, which, they think, can administer the least alleviation of their pain. Forfaking the Fountain of living waters, they hew out for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water. Thus, Saul, in one of the most distressing situations of his life, applied for relief to a woman who had a familiar spirit: and, in like manner, when Ahaz, one of his successors in the throne, found himself too weak for his enemies, he first courted the aid of the Assyrians; but being disappointed from that quarter, he sacrificed to the gods of Damascus, and said, "Because the gods of the king of Syria help them, therefore will I sacrifice to them, that they may help me also." And thus it is with all men of un sanctified hearts. They go on, from
one

one refuge of lies to another, encompassing themselves with sparks of their own kindling, and preferring the aid of idols to that of the living God. In this manner they deceive themselves for a season. As long as they have any thing like a foundation of hope, they endeavour to keep their heads above the flood; but, when they feel no bottom, when the props on which they stayed themselves glide away, their strength fails, their hearts die within them, and they sink as lead in the mighty waters.

Whereas, when the righteous, the people of God, are in any trouble or affliction, their refuge is on high. They lift up their hearts, with their hands, to God in the heavens. How amiable and becoming was the conduct of Job! When the Lord was smiting, he was praying; and, when repeated tidings were brought him of the loss of his children, and of all his worldly substance, in pious submission he bowed to the ground, and worshipped. When Jehoshaphat was attacked at once by the enemies of Moab and Ammon, we behold him standing before all the congregation in the house of the Lord, and thus addressing the God of heaven: "O Lord, our God, we have
" no might against this great company that cometh
" against us, neither know we what to do; but our
" eyes are upon Thee." Does the fig-tree cease to blossom, and is there no fruit in the vine? Though the labour of the olive fail, and there be no herd in the stall; yea, though the earth be removed, and the mountains carried into the midst of the sea: the children of God can look above and beyond this universal desolation, and join the prophet in these expressions of confidence, "I will rejoice in the Lord, and
" joy in the God of my salvation."

And such was the conduct of David, in the passage of scripture which we have just now read. His affliction, indeed, was great; his enemies had plundered and burned the city, in which his own family, and the families of his friends, resided. Their wives and children were carried into captivity; and, to complete

plete his distress, they spake of stoning him, as the cause of all their calamities. But, observe to what refuge he fled; he encouraged himself in the Lord his God: And if the Lord be our God, whatever danger or distress we are in, we also have the same source of consolation. But, as I would not give false hopes to any, or speak peace, when there is no peace, I must here observe to you, that none, but such as stand in this relation to God, are capable of enjoying this advantage. Presumptuous and obstinate sinners can never exercise a rational hope and trust in God; because every part of his word speaks terrible things against them. In the 7th Psalm, there is an awful threatening to this purpose: "God is angry with the wicked every day. He hath bent his bow, and made it ready: he hath also prepared for them the instruments of death." They may, indeed, presume for a time; they may flatter themselves with the hopes of impunity: but, their trust will at length prove as the spider's web, and their hope as the giving up of the ghost. Whereas, they who are related to the Lord, as their God, who have embraced the offers of his mercy, and are reconciled to him through the death of his Son, may, without any presumption, claim every privilege of which David was possessed, and stand upon as firm ground as he did, when they encourage themselves in the Lord their God.

In discoursing further on this comfortable subject, I shall endeavour, through divine assistance, *First*, To point out to you some of those encouragements, which the gospel-covenant holds forth to the people of God in times of affliction; *Secondly*, To show you upon what solid grounds they may trust in him for these encouragements; and then conclude with a short practical improvement of the subject.

I. I begin, then, with pointing out to you some of those encouragements, which the gospel-covenant holds forth to the people of God in times of affliction.

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1. And the first I shall mention, is God's gracious presence with them in all their distresses. And, what a reviving consolation is this ! The presence of God with his people, dispels all the clouds of affliction and sorrow, as the sun scatters the fogs of the morning ; it composes the mind, and fills it with confidence and joy. In what a high strain does David speak of it, in the 23d Psalm ! " Though I walk," says he, " through the dark valley and shadow of death, I " will fear no evil, for thou art with me." Sometimes, indeed, the children of God make unwarrantable reflections on the distresses with which they are visited. They are tempted to say, as Gideon did, " If God be with us, why doth all this evil befall " us ?" But it is not because the Lord hath forsaken them, that he deals with them in this manner ; it is for the chastisement of their offences : and, when he does so, he acts the part of a father and a friend. " Whom the Lord loveth," says the apostle, " he " chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he re- " ceiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with " you as with sons ; for what son is he whom the " Father chasteneth not (a) ?" Nay, affliction is so far from being a mark of God's forsaking his people, that he is never more graciously present with them, than when they are afflicted. Thus, he was with Daniel in the lion's den ; thus also with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, when they were cast into the burning fiery furnace ; when this confession was extorted from the trembling king of Babylon, " Did " we not cast three men bound into the fire ? and " lo, I see four men, loose, walking in the midst of " the flames ; and the form of the fourth is as the " Son of God." In like manner, the Lord is still present with his children, when they are under the rod. He not only, as a wise and loving parent, corrects them for their faults ; but he mortifies their remaining corruptions, improves their graces, and sometimes gives them such experience of divine support

(a) Heb. xii.

support and consolation in the day of affliction, as prevents them from despondency during every period of their future lives. This is one of the distinguishing parts, if I may be allowed the expression, of JEHOVAH's character. He is the Comforter of the afflicted, and raiseth up them that are bowed down. The world, indeed, smiles upon the prosperous, while it frequently disregards the miserable and unfortunate. But the ways of God are not as our ways. Instead of keeping at a distance in the dark and cloudy day, his everlasting arms are then around them. The light of his countenance often dispels the darkest gloom, and elevates the heart which the world would depress. In a word, he lifteth up the hands which hang down, and giveth grace to help in every time of need.

2. If the Lord be our God, then, all our afflictions are blessings; and instead of hurting us, they will issue in our greater good. The most dreadful part of any trouble, is the apprehension of God's displeasure, which it seems to indicate. Let that apprehension be removed, and, to a Christian, the affliction is infinitely lessened. "O, Lord," says the Psalmist, "rebuke me not in thine anger, neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure (a)." He does not simply deprecate the rebuke, the chastening hand, but the wrath or displeasure of God. It was the infusion of this that made the cup of affliction a bitter cup. He therefore prays, that the Lord would not deal with him in anger, and he would then quietly submit to any affliction with which he should be pleased to visit him. And this indeed is the peculiar consolation of his servants. They are assured, that when their heavenly Father smites them, he does it in love. The wounds which he inflicts, are not the wounds of an enemy, but of a friend. Though affliction, in its own nature, be a part of the curse, yet to the Christian it is deprived of its malignity, and converted into a real blessing. And accordingly you find it recorded as

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(a) Psal. vi. 1.

such, among the promises of the covenant. "If my children break my statutes, and keep not my commandments, I will visit their transgressions with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes (b)."—"For as many as I love," saith the great Redeemer, "I rebuke and chasten." And hence believers may be fully assured, that such afflictions, so far from doing them any harm, will really contribute to their happiness. For, as frost in the winter, instead of hurting the earth, kills such noxious weeds as exhaust its strength; so, the rod of affliction is of great use to wean our hearts from this ensnaring world, and to mortify those corrupt affections which gentler means could not subdue. "We know," says the apostle, "that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose (c)."—"They work together." The expression is emphatical. View them separately, or each by itself, and some of them may appear to be awful and threatening. But view them together, as sent and guided by the hand of infinite wisdom and love; view them in this light, and it will be found, that, if any of them were wanting, something would be wanting in the system of our happiness. Thus, Joseph said to his brethren, "Ye thought evil against me; but God meant it for good, to save much people alive." Have not the saints, then, the greatest reason to encourage themselves in the Lord their God, since they are not only assured of his gracious presence with them in all their afflictions, but that those very afflictions, instead of hurting them, are even now working for their good?

3. It is a ground of encouragement to the godly under affliction, that they themselves will, ere long, be with God, and dwell for ever in his immediate presence. It was the faith of this that supported the primitive Christians under all their afflictions. "They took joyfully," says the apostle to the Hebrews, "the spoiling of their goods, knowing that they had

(b) Psal. lxxxix. 31, 32.

(c) Rom. viii. 28.

“ had in heaven a better and an enduring substance.”
 “ They were troubled on every side, yet not distressed; they were perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed.” And how did this happen? The same apostle explains it, when he informs us in what point of view they considered affliction: “ For our light affliction,” says he, “ which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory: while we look not at the things which are seen, which are temporal; but at the things which are not seen, which are eternal (a).”—
 “ For we know,” says he, (you see he does not speak of it doubtfully, but with a firm unshaken faith,) “ we know, that when our earthly house of this tabernacle is dissolved, we have a building of God, an house, not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.” And thus, also, may every servant of Christ look cheerfully beyond all the distresses of life, to that blessed rest which remains for the people of God. In a word, they who have the Lord for their God, are possessed of an all-satisfying and never-failing portion. They are begotten again to a lively hope, the hope of an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and which fadeth not away. And therefore, at all times they may encourage themselves in the Lord, and say, in the triumphant language of the apostle, “ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or peril, or nakedness, or sword? Nay, in all these things, we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.”

Thus, you see what abundant encouragement the gospel-covenant holds forth to the people of God in times of affliction. The Lord their God is graciously present with them. All their afflictions, instead of hurting them, will issue in their happiness; and they have the assured hope of being, ere long, in heaven, where those afflictions shall be felt no more, and

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where:

(a) 2 Cor. iv. 7, 8.

where they shall be abundantly compensated with fulness of joy for ever.

II. I am to shew you what solid grounds the people of God have to trust in him for those encouragements under affliction; and I shall briefly mention the three following :

1. The consideration of his infinite wisdom, power and goodness, is a sufficient ground for our trust and confidence in him. For, being infinitely wise, he not only knows all the various wants of his children, and the dangers to which they are exposed, but he knows the most proper means for their relief, and how to make all things work together for their good. And as his wisdom is infinite, so his power is almighty. He can support his people under the heaviest weight of afflictions; protect them from every storm that can arise against them; and command, when he pleases, the tempest into a calm. But, finally, his goodness is equal to his power and wisdom; for the riches of his grace are unsearchable, and his love passeth knowledge. Here, then, is the firmest foundation for the Christian's faith and trust in God: infinite wisdom directing almighty power, and all under the influence of the most diffusive goodness and parental affection, for his support, consolation, and deliverance. Let Israel then hope in the Lord; for with the Lord there is mercy, and plenteous redemption.

2. The people of God may safely trust in him for these encouragements, when they consider the promises he hath made them. Hath he not expressly said, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee."—"When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee, and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee; when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burnt, neither shall the flame kindle upon thee (*d*)."—"I will strengthen thee, yea, I will help thee. I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness." As an affectionate

tionate parent watches over his children, and will not leave them wholly to the care of strangers; so, the Lord has promised to watch over his people. "Like
 " as a father pitieth his children, so, the Lord piti-
 " eth them that fear him. For he knoweth their
 " frame; he remembereth that they are dust (e)." —
 " He will give his angels charge over them, to keep
 " them in all their ways (f)." Angels guard the
 people of God through the ordinary paths of life: but, view them in affliction, and you will see what is promised them. "He shall call upon me, saith the
 " Lord, and I will answer him (g)." — "I will be
 " with him in trouble, and deliver him." Is not this, then, also a solid foundation, upon which you may build your trust and confidence in God? For, is he not faithful who has promised? "He is not a man
 " that he should change, neither the son of man, that
 " he should repent." The promises of men are never absolutely certain. The insincerity, the mutability, and want of power in human nature, make it vain to trust in princes, or in the son of man, in whom there is no help. But truth and uprightness are the unalterable perfections of the Supreme Being. With him, there is no variableness, nor shadow of turning; and he can never want power to accomplish his promises. Happy, then, is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God.

3. The experience which the people of God have had of his goodness and faithfulness to them under affliction, is another ground and reason why they should trust in him. The pious Psalmist tells us, "that he waited patiently for the Lord, and God inclined to him, and heard his cry: he brought him
 " up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry
 " clay, and set his feet upon a rock, and established
 " his goings (h)." Nor was this the experience of David only, but of great numbers that lived before:

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" him.

(e) Psal. ciii. 13.—14.

(g) Psal. xci. 15.

(f) Psal. xci. 11:

(h) Psal. xl.

him. "Our fathers," says he, "trusted in God, and he delivered them; they cried unto him, and were delivered; they trusted in him, and were not confounded (b)." The apostle Paul also tells us, that God comforted him and his fellow-sufferers in all their tribulation; nay, that as the sufferings of Christ abounded in them, so their consolation also abounded by Christ (c). And have not we the same God in whom we may trust, and the same promises on which we may rely? Is his hand now shortened, that it cannot save, or his ear heavy, that it cannot hear? Do not his sympathy with his afflicted people, his power and his faithfulness, continue through all generations? May not this fact be appealed to the experience of many of his servants, even to the present day? Come hither, then, ye that fear the Lord, and declare what he hath done for your souls. When you were weak, and feeble in your minds, did he not support you? When loaded with affliction, and ready to sink under your woes, have you not looked to him, and been lightened? When mourning, and almost in despair, hath he not sent you a word of consolation? Can you, in this manner, review the history of his love, and not say, with admiration and gratitude, "O, how great is thy goodness, which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee, which thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee, before the sons of men! I will therefore trust, and not be afraid; I will trust in the mercy of the Lord for ever; for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength."

Thus, then, you see upon what solid principles the faints may encourage themselves in the Lord their God, under every chastening dispensation of divine Providence.

Let us then, as the improvement of this subject, give all diligence to make our calling and election sure.

(b) Psal. xxii. 4, 5.

(c) 2 Cor. i. 4, 5.

sure. You, that are still strangers to God, seriously consider the misery of your present state. When the storm of affliction breaks upon you, where can you fly for relief? God is not the portion of your souls; you can only have recourse to "the things which are on earth," which, at best, are but a lying refuge, a broken reed, that will not only fail, but wound and pierce you. What a miserable condition was Saul in! How mournful his complaint to Samuel! "I am sore distressed," says he; "for the Philistines make war against me, and God is departed from me, and answereth me no more." Give, therefore, no sleep to your eyes, nor slumber to your eyelids, till you have reason to conclude, that you have passed from death to life, and are united to him, who is the resurrection and the life. In this way you may, with joy, draw water out of the wells of salvation, for your establishment and comfort, under all the troubles of life; and at last, having passed through the dark valley of death under the conduct of the good Shepherd, you may enter the New Jerusalem, with songs and everlasting joy upon your heads; and sorrow and sighing shall be no more.

And, finally, you, who are the children of God, should encourage yourselves in him, under all your trials and afflictions. What though the present dispensation of God's providence be dark and gloomy; what though the affliction that lies upon you be grievous: Have you not abundant reason for consolation and joy in the assurance of God's presence? Are not all things, even now, working together for your good? And, in a little, will not God wipe away all tears from your eyes, and make you perfectly blessed in the enjoyment of himself? Why then, O Christian, should you droop and faint, like others, in the day of adversity? Have you not an all-sufficient refuge provided in the gospel of Christ? Is not the name of the Lord a strong tower, into which you may run and be safe? Why, then, sink under present

sent affliction, or despond at the prospect of approaching danger. Nay, though deprived of every earthly comfort, and involved in the deepest distress, still you may encourage yourselves in the Lord, and rejoice in him, as the God of your salvation: For the Lord God is a sun and shield; the Lord will give grace and glory; and no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly. Amen.

S E R.

SERMON XIV.

ON CHRISTIAN OBEDIENCE, AND THE
INFLUENCE OF BAD EXAMPLE.

PSALM cxix. 115.

Depart from me, ye evil-doers; for I will keep the commandments of my God.

R- **I**T is unnecessary to trace the connection between the different parts of this inspired hymn. It seems to be a collection of David's pious and devout ejaculations to God, written down as they occurred, and afterwards digested into this psalm. The general scope and design of it, is to magnify the law of God, and enforce the observation of its precepts, as that in which religion chiefly consists. This the Psalmist does, from a variety of the most powerful and convincing arguments; such as the supreme excellence and perfection of that divine law, its usefulness to men even in this world, and the inward peace and joy that results from obedience to it. He insists particularly on his own experience, of the benefit and advantage of observing the commandments of God, and the unspeakable pleasure and satisfaction he had derived from that observance. And hence we find him frequently repeating his resolutions to this effect; an instance of which you have in the words

words of the text: "Depart from me," says he, "ye evil-doers; for I will keep the commandments of my God."

In discoursing on these words, I shall endeavour, by divine assistance, *First*, To explain to you that obedience to the law of God, or that keeping of his commandments, which the gospel requires. *Secondly*, Shew you how necessary it is to avoid the company of the wicked, and have no society with evil-doers, if you would keep the commandments of God. And, *Lastly*, Conclude with some practical application.

I. I am to explain that obedience to the law of God, or that keeping of his commandments which the gospel requires.

1. It must flow from a heart purified by faith; for, without faith, the apostle tells us, it is impossible to please God; and whatsoever, says he, is not of faith, is sin. Some of the wiser and more enlightened Heathens made considerable progress in the external observance of the law which God had written on their hearts; but yet their works, however splendid in the eyes of men, could not be pleasing and acceptable to God; because, their hearts not being purified, they could never attain to that perfection which the law of God requires. In every part of our duty, God has a special regard to the heart. "My son," says he, "give me thine heart;" and, if the heart be not given him, he pays no regard to your other offerings. We may, indeed, have a specious profession, and acquire to ourselves a fair character among men, while we are strangers to the true practice of devotion. Would you then find acceptance with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, in your endeavours to keep his commandments, let it be your first and principal concern to get your hearts sanctified by renewing grace; for this is the one thing needful. "They that are in the flesh," says the apostle, "cannot please God." Unless your obedience flows from love to God, and a delight in his law

law after the inward man, it will be of no account in His sight, who judges of actions by the principles from which they spring, and demands the willing obedience of the heart; nay, it will be as the sacrifice of the wicked, an abomination to the Lord.

2. It must be with impartial regard to his glory, as our ultimate end. "Whether, therefore," says the apostle, "ye eat or drink, or whatever ye do, do all to the glory of God; for of him, and through him, and to him, are all things; to whom be glory for ever." How many assume a religious profession, with no other view but to be seen of men, that they may procure the esteem of their neighbours, or serve their own interest? Nay, some men assume the mask of religion, that, under this venerable cover, they may indulge in their secret vices with the less suspicion. Such, we find, were the Pharisees of old. They loved to pray standing in the synagogues, and in the corners of the streets, that they might be seen of men: when they fasted, they disfigured their faces, that they might appear unto man to fast. And our Saviour adds, "For a pretence they made long prayers, that they might devour widows houses." But this is infinitely short of the obedience which the gospel requires. It is only, as the prophet expresses it, "a sacrificing to our own net, and burning incense to our own drag." And when God comes to pass sentence on such professors of religion, he may say, "Did ye these things at all unto me?" Were they not rather done to gratify some particular humour, to gain the approbation of men, or to serve some temporal purpose? and, if so, you certainly have your reward in the accomplishment of your wishes. From me, as you did them not to me, you can expect no reward. Let us not then have such mean and mercenary ends in view, but have a steadfast regard to the glory of God, who, as he is the First cause, and infinitely excellent and amiable in himself, is also that Being on whom our happiness must finally depend. In a word, whatever we do in religion,

religion, we are required to do it heartily as unto the Lord, and not unto men; knowing, that of the Lord we shall receive the reward of the inheritance, if we thus serve the Lord Christ (a).

3. It must be with humility and self-denial. We must beware of imagining that there is any intrinsic worth or merit in the best of our services to recommend them to God; and, when we have done all, we must humbly acknowledge that we have done nothing but our duty, and are at best but unprofitable servants. Whatever the pride of man may suggest, this is the lesson that Christ teaches his disciples: "If any man," says he, "will come after me, let him deny himself." And it is a lesson so absolutely necessary at our entrance on the Christian life, that, without it, all our devotion is but a form of godliness, and, like the boast of the Pharisee, an abomination to the Lord. Nay, so far from imagining that we can merit any favour at the hand of God by our best obedience, we must be deeply sensible of our own unworthiness; that even our purest services are stained with much sinful imperfection, and all our own righteousness but as filthy rags. The language of a sincere Christian, while endeavouring to keep the commandments of God, is, "Enter not into judgment with thy servant. If thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquity, who could possibly stand?" And from a lively sense of this, conscious that we have nothing in ourselves to rely upon, we must have all our trust and dependence upon the abundant merit and powerful intercession of Christ, by which alone our obedience can be accepted.—Neither must we think that we can perform this obedience by any power or strength of our own. No; it would betray the grossest ignorance, both of ourselves and of the word of God, to entertain such a thought. "Without me," says our Saviour, "ye can do nothing." And the apostle tells us, that "we are not sufficient, of ourselves, to think so much as a good thought;" and, by a necessary

(a) Col. iii. 23, 24.

cessary consequence, we are quite unable, without Divine assistance, to perform a good action. We must therefore look up to God for the promised aids of his grace, that, through Christ strengthening us, we may be able to do all things.

4. It must be universal: "Ye are my friends," says our Lord, "if ye do whatsoever I command you." There are some who appear very zealous in observing those precepts that more immediately respect God; but, if we examine their conduct in those which concern their neighbour, we will find them very defective. I need not here spend time in proving what is so evident from daily experience. For, what evil speaking, what reproaching of our neighbour's character, and what unjust dealing between man and man, are not every day forced upon our observation; and yet, who make greater pretensions to religion than some who are guilty of those faults? Would you then distinguish yourselves from such, and warrantably expect the Divine approbation, you must endeavour to keep a conscience void of offence towards God and towards men, carefully observing the precepts both of the first and second table of the law. I do not say, indeed, that our obedience will be perfect; for, alas! perfection is not the property of any thing in this state and world: "If we say we have no sin," said the apostle John, "we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." But yet, a Christian will not, deliberately, and with the consent of his mind, allow of any defect in his obedience, nor of the least transgression of any command of Christ. Nay, it will be his sincere desire to guard against every sin without exception, and to give an unreserved obedience to the law of God, as far as it is known to him; and whenever he fails and comes short of his duty, he will be heartily sorry, and endeavour, in a humble dependence on divine grace, to be more circumspect and watchful for the future. Hence are those pious breathings of David's soul: "O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes,"
† P "then

“ then shall I not be ashamed when I have respect to
 “ all thy commandments. Incline my heart to thy
 “ testimonies. I have sworn, and will perform it,
 “ that I will keep thy righteous judgments.”

5. It must be constant and persevering: “ I have
 “ inclined my heart,” says the Psalmist, “ to perform
 “ thy statutes alway, even unto the end.” No man
 can be said to keep God’s commandments, who only
 seems to attend to his duty at certain times and sea-
 sons, and at other times neglects it. Some, for in-
 stance, put on the appearance or show of being reli-
 gious about the time of a sacrament, on the Sabbath
 day, and on other public and solemn occasions; but,
 at other times, they throw off the mask, and indulge
 themselves in forbidden liberties. In a word, there
 are many professing Christians, who serve God at
 intervals only. Terrified, perhaps, by some alarm-
 ing Providence, or roused by an awakening ser-
 mon, they set about reading and praying, and other
 duties which they had formerly neglected: but, in a
 little time, their devotion cools again; their goodness
 becomes like the morning cloud, and like the early
 dew, which soon pass away. Nay, too often they
 return with the dog to his vomit, and with the sow
 that was washed, to her wallowing in the mire. But,
 be not deceived; this is not to keep the commandments
 of God; nor are those the marks of his children.
 Evangelical obedience is a much more settled and
 constant thing. It may possibly admit of some breaks
 and interruptions; but it is what the Christian habi-
 tually aims at, and what will never be quite laid
 aside. For, as the Spirit of God informs us, “ the
 “ righteous shall hold on his way, and he that hath
 “ clean hands shall be stronger and stronger (a).”
 And this brings me to observe,

Lastly, That it must be still growing and increasing.
 “ The path of the just,” says Solomon, “ is as the
 “ shining light, that shineth more and more unto
 “ the perfect day.” It is very true, indeed, that

our

our obedience, while we are in this world, never can be perfect: for the best of saints, while here, know but in part, and are but sanctified in part. Their obedience, however, is progressive, and still advancing nearer and nearer to perfection. Hence we find the obedience of the Christian compared in scripture to the growth of a human body, which, you know, advances from infancy to childhood, from childhood to youth, and from youth to complete maturity. And, in the same manner, the apostle says, we all come, in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. And such we find was the same apostle's obedience; which he describes with great strength and beauty in allusion to the Olympic games: "Forgetting," says he, "those things that are behind, and reaching forward to those things that are before, I press towards the mark, for the prize of the high calling that is with God in Christ Jesus (a)." In a word, the regular course of a Christian's obedience produces that effect on the people of God which the Psalmist particularly mentions: "They go on from strength to strength, until at last they appear before the Lord in Zion (b)."

Thus I have endeavoured to show you what that obedience is, or that keeping of the commandments of God which the gospel requires, and which, as many of you as were yesterday worthy communicants, have, in humble dependence on the righteousness and grace of our Redeemer, sincerely resolved to perform. I now proceed,

II. To show you how necessary it is, that you avoid the society of the wicked, and have no fellowship with evil-doers, if you would keep the commandments of God.

And, that you may know who those evil-doers are, whose company you are to avoid, you may consider two

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passages.

(a) Phil. iii. 13, 14.

(b) Ps. iv. 7.

passages of scripture, where their characters are distinctly described by the Spirit of God, whose judgment is according to truth. The first passage to which I refer, you will find in Cor. vi. 9, 10. "Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolators, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God." And the other in 1 Tim. i. 9, 10. "Knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers, and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, for whoremongers, for them that defile themselves with mankind, for men-stealers, for liars, for perjured persons, and if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine." But, besides these open and notorious sinners, whose lives are a scandal to human nature, I must tell you, that, by the wicked and evil-doers, we are likewise to understand, even such who, though in their outward behaviour they may be sober and apparently harmless, yet have no concern about religion and the fear of God, who never attend public worship, nor give any evidence of their belief in a Deity, or in the truth of our most holy religion: For, whatever figure and appearance persons of this description may make in the world, yet they, as well as the openly abandoned, are dangerous enemies to the souls of men. These, then, are the wicked and evil-doers, whose company you must avoid, if you would keep the commandments of God.

I acknowledge, indeed, it is impossible for the best Christian, wholly to avoid the company and conversation of the wicked. He may, as the apostle tells us, as well abandon society, and go out of the world. Nor must we neglect the duties of civility, and good manners, even to the worst of men; for this would reflect dishonour upon our religion, and be inconsistent.

istent with the conduct of its blessed Author, in whose lips was the law of kindness in every situation. Nay, when we have reason to think we may be useful to the ungodly and profane, by our instruction and example, we ought not to deny them our company or conversation; though here, indeed, great caution must be used, lest, while we intend their spiritual good, we hurt ourselves by any sinful compliance. Our great Lord and Master, we find, sometimes conversed with publicans and sinners, though he himself was holy, harmless, and undefiled; and this apostle tells us, that, in things indifferent, he became all things to all men, that he might by all means save some.

But you must take care not to make the impious and wicked your intimate companions, nor spend too much of your leisure hours in their company, whatever entertainment or worldly advantage you may expect to find from it. If you would be faithful to God, and maintain upon your minds a serious sense of religion, you must avoid, as much as possible, all familiar conversation with them, and say with the Psalmist in the text, "Depart from me, ye evil-doers; for I will keep the commandments of my God." For, consider, that frequenting the company of the wicked and profane, will have a fatal tendency to indispose you for your duty, and even to efface any good impression that may have been made upon your minds. We live in a land blessed with the privileges of the gospel, where we enjoy the means of grace in purity and abundance. And by these, some sense of religion is commonly wrought on the minds of men, especially in their younger years. When these good impressions are duly cultivated, they grow, under the influence of grace, more lively and vigorous, until, at length, the Christian is made perfect in holiness; but if they are resisted, and the Spirit of God provoked to withdraw, men turn obstinate in sin, and persist in it without remorse. Now, what can have a more direct tendency to resist, and,

at length, wear out all serious impressions, than frequenting loose and vicious company? Let me beseech you, therefore, in the words of the apostle Peter, to "beware, lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness (a)." But frequenting the company of the wicked, is not only apt to weaken, and, at length, eradicate, all serious impressions; it has likewise a tendency to stir up the mind against the power and life of religion. Look abroad into the world, and judge for yourselves. Observe, for instance, a good person, who has been piously educated: No sooner does he frequent bad company, than he begins to look upon prayer, and other religious duties, as unnecessary, and to think his parents too severe, when they endeavour to make him abandon his sinful pursuits. Having now become licentious in his behaviour, and libertine in his opinions, he is ready to think a godly minister too stiff and precise, because he faithfully reproves the lovers of pleasure; and thus, by degrees, he not only loses all that regard for religion, and the people of God, in which he was brought up, but, at length, walks with confidence in the counsel of the ungodly, and sits in the seat of the scornful. I do not ask you, whether this be really the case or not. The fact is too evident to be denied, too melancholy not to be lamented. Many who have had a religious education, nay, who once discovered a sober and serious disposition, by falling into loose and profane company, have not only lost all relish for religion and virtue, but feel in themselves a distaste, and, what indeed would appear incredible, if it were not confirmed by experience, a contempt of every thing serious and sacred. And this will still appear with greater evidence, if you consider likewise, that frequenting bad company is a sad inlet to all manner of sin, and often leads men into the practice of the most shameful and pernicious vices. "Be not deceived," says the apostle; "evil communications
" corrupt

(a) 2 Pet. iii. 17.

“corrupt good manners.” There is in all men a natural inclination to vice; and every one acquainted with himself, knows how difficult it is to resist this inward propensity, even with the assistance of good instruction, and virtuous example. How much more difficult then, must it be to resist it, amidst the insinuating arguments, and ensnaring examples of profane and vicious company! Difficult, did I say? nay, it is almost impossible; for the corruption of our nature is like tinder, apt to catch fire, and be kindled by the least spark of temptation. Can a man touch pitch, and not be defiled? Can he walk through the flames, and not be burnt? No more can they who associate themselves with the impious workers of iniquity, escape being hurt by their contagious principles and conduct. How often have we seen men, through the influence of bad company, trifle away their precious time, day after day, in idleness and dissipation! How often have they, by this means, learned to blaspheme the name of God; to profane and pollute the Sabbath; to dishonour parents, and speak evil of dignities; to injure their neighbour in his character and person; to debauch, to trick, to rob, to steal, to lie, to deceive, and to covet unlawful gain! How many have lamented these things upon a death-bed or a scaffold, and cursed the day that introduced them to the company of those, by whose conversation and example, the foundations of their religion and their morals had been overthrown!

And now, to you that are the professors of religion, and were yesterday at the table of the Lord, I would address myself on this subject. You have heard what that obedience is which the gospel requires; and, as communicants, you are under the most solemn obligations to perform it: nay, you have declared in the presence of the omniscient JEHOVAH, and even appealed to him as the witness of your sincerity, that you will deny all ungodliness and worldly lusts, and live soberly, and righteously, and godly, in this present world. Would you then be faithful to God in
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keeping his commandments, avoid, as much as shall be in your power, all loose, profane, and licentious company; mix not with their society: beware, especially, of cultivating an intimate acquaintance with them, "lest," as the wise man expresses it, "you learn their way, and get a blot to your souls?" This is the advice of the Spirit of God to you, and it is inculcated with a peculiar earnestness of expression: "Enter not," says he, "into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men: avoid it, pass not by it; turn from it, and pass away (a)." Let me intreat you to consider what an absurd thing it is; how inconsistent with your character and profession, if, while you pretend to be the friends and disciples of Christ, you associate yourselves with his enemies! For, what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? what communion hath light with darkness? and what concord hath Christ with Belial? How indecent is it, nay, what a contradiction, to be seen to-day at the table of the Lord, and to-morrow, among the workers of iniquity! To join, at one time, with the saints, in Christian communion, and, at another, with the ungodly, in drinking the intemperate cup, in their wanton songs, and profane jests! Are not such shameful hypocrisy and falsehood, a reproach and a condemnation? How can you answer it, you careless professors, to God, to the world, or to your own consciences? You confirm the infidel in his unbelief, you harden the sinner in wickedness, and give occasion to the enemies of religion to blaspheme. I charge you, therefore, before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing, as you have named the name of Christ, that you depart from all iniquity. And I intreat you in the most earnest manner, and even, for God's sake, beseech you, that you guard against the infectious company of the wicked; and ever say, with the Psalmist, in our text, "Depart from me, ye evil-doers; for I will keep the commandments of my God."

But

(a) Prov. iv. 14, 15.

But perhaps you will say, What! shall we be singular and precise? Shall we be pointed out as separatists from the way of the world? This will draw upon us the odium and the censure of all our acquaintance; nay, it will expose us to scorn and ridicule, and may even be prejudicial to our temporal interests.—I acknowledge, indeed, that in things lawful, or at least indifferent, singularity ought to be avoided. But, in things where your duty to God is concerned, you must neither be ashamed, nor afraid to be singular. Is singularity, in this case, to be deemed a reproach? Does any man, suppose a physician, a lawyer, a divine, or a tradesman, reckon it an affront to him, to be pointed out as one of singular eminence in his own profession? And shall a Christian, whose profession is, of all others, the most excellent, think it a disparagement to him, a thing that he needs to be ashamed of, to be remarked and taken notice of by others, as one singularly eminent in religion? He that can think so, must have a mean spirit, and a vitiated taste. Remember, that if you make it your chief care to please men, you cannot be the servants of Christ. You must therefore get above the fear of the world, and the shame of practising strict godliness; and study, above all things, to approve yourselves unto God; for it is by his judgment you must stand or fall. And if God be for you, who can be against you? On the other hand, if he be against you, who can be for you? or what advantage can you derive from the favour and friendship of men, if he be your enemy?

And now, to conclude, would you be preserved from the ensnaring arts of the wicked, in order to keep the commandments of God;—

1. Labour to maintain a firm belief of the important truths of religion, and to live always under a lively and affecting impression of them. For nothing tends more to corrupt the minds and morals of men, than atheism and infidelity: And, even though you have

have not come the length of disbelieving the principles of religion; yet, if you neglect to consider them, if you suffer them to lie, as it were, dormant in your minds, and take no care to live under their influence, you will be continually in danger of being made a prey by every vile and worthless seducer.

2. Be always on your guard against the solicitations of such as would draw you into bad company: And beware of trusting to the firmness of your own virtue, as if you were able to stand secure against all the wiles which they may employ to ensnare you. Believe it, it will be dangerous for you to try the experiment; for God may leave you, and then all your good resolutions will be ineffectual.

Lastly, Pray much to God, in the name of Christ, that he, by his grace, may preserve you from the snares of the wicked. Make frequent use of that petition in the Lord's prayer, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." For, except you depend upon God, and earnestly implore the assistance of his grace, all your caution and watchfulness will be in vain.

SERMON XV.

THE SACRIFICE OF CHRIST WORTHY OF ADMIRATION AND GRATITUDE.

Rev. v. 11, 12.—*And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne, and the beasts, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; saying, with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.*

THESE words contain a song of praise, in honour of the Saviour of mankind, which John, the beloved apostle, heard sung by the angels and saints in glory. The occasion of their joining in this song, we are told in the 6th and 7th verses of this chapter, was Christ's undertaking to open the book of the divine counsels, concerning the more remarkable events that were to happen to the Christian church through all the succeeding periods of time. "And I beheld," says the apostle, "and lo, in the midst of the throne, and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb, as if it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent forth into all the earth." And he came and took the book out of the

the right hand of him that sat upon the throne, namely, that he might disclose and execute the divine purposes contained in it, for the protection and benefit of his church. And no sooner had he done so, than the apostle heard both the church triumphant and militant, unite in sacred harmony to his praise. They sung a new song, saying, "Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof; for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and hast made us unto our God kings and priests, and we shall reign on the earth." In the two following verses, this sublime anthem of praise, thus begun by the church, is carried on by the angels, who cheerfully concur with the redeemed of the Lord, in celebrating the infinite worth and excellency of the Lamb: "And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne, and the beasts, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; saying, with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing."

It is pleasant to observe here, who they are that joined together in this sublime and devout ascription of praise to our Redeemer. They are the angels, the four beasts, and the four and twenty elders. The angels, those glorious and blessed spirits, though they need no Saviour themselves, and are unalterably confirmed in a state of purity and happiness; yet they rejoice in our redemption. With what cheerfulness did they descend to bring the welcome news to earth! To what notes of melody are they represented as tuning their golden harps on that happy occasion! Far from being filled with envy, in consequence of the high favour which we were to receive, they took part in the joy which they communicated, and praised God, saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, and good will towards men." With
what

what readiness and alacrity did they minister to our Saviour, while he was employed in our redemption! And when, at last, the scene of his humiliation and suffering was terminated; when all that part of his work which was to be transacted on earth, was finished: With what transports of joy did they attend him, in his glorious ascension to his Father, and our Father, to his God and our God! And here, in the text, they are represented as joining with the church, in celebrating the praises of our Redeemer; and in the following verse, with the rest of the creation, in ascribing blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and to the Lamb, for ever and ever.

What returns, then, of love and gratitude, do we owe to the blessed angels! How should we rejoice in their happiness, and do what lies in our power to promote it! It is true, indeed, we have no opportunity of testifying our regard to them by outward acts; but there is one way whereby every soul in this assembly may be instrumental in advancing, in some degree, even the happiness of the angels. You, who are unconverted, and yet in your sins, may do it, if, through the influence of divine grace, you pay such regard to the truths of the gospel, as shall issue in a sincere repentance, and saving conversion to God: for our blessed Saviour expressly assures us, that there is joy in heaven over every sinner that repenteth; and of this joy the angels do undoubtedly partake. And you who are sincere believers, will increase the joy of angels, by your increasing ardour and delight in the knowledge of Christ, and by your growing zeal and diligence in the practice of your duty.

2. The four beasts, or, as it had been better translated, the four living beings or *intelligences*, and the four and twenty elders, are here represented, in conjunction with the angels, as ascribing infinite merit and worthiness to our Redeemer.

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Some interpreters think, that, by the four living creatures, and the four and twenty elders, are meant the heavenly world, the brightest and most excellent of created beings, and the glorified spirits of just men made perfect, who are as the angels, and join with them in their exalted worship. But the general, and indeed most probable opinion, is, that by these expressions, we are to understand the whole church of the redeemed, both ministers and people, in the days of the gospel; so that, we ourselves are a few of that happy number, if we are indeed of those that worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus. By the four living creatures, then, we may understand, the holy, enlightened, and faithful ministers of Christ, the pastors and teachers he has given to the church. And by the four and twenty elders, the whole body of private Christians, and devout worshippers of God, through the one Mediator, in all the assemblies of the saints. In the fourth verse of the preceding chapter, they are said to be round about the throne; for so are all that worship God in spirit and in truth. They are clothed in white, which is emblematical of their purity and holiness. And they have crowns on their heads, for they are heirs of the kingdom, and are to reign with Christ.

This, then, is an easy and familiar explanation of the four living creatures, and twenty four elders. They are all, as in the foregoing verses, the redeemed to God, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation, and are made to him kings and priests. In the text, they are said to be an innumerable multitude; ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; and there is the voice of many angels joining with them, saying, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing."

In discoursing on this subject, I propose, by divine assistance,

assistance, *First*, To consider the subject of this song; the Lamb slain. *Secondly*, The propriety and fitness of it as applied to Christ our Redeemer. And, *Lastly*, Conclude, by leading your thoughts to some practical improvement.

The subject of this song, is the Lamb slain; that is, Christ crucified, the Lord of glory making his soul an offering for sin. And,

1. The first thought which must occur to us on a subject of this kind, is the manner in which he submitted to death. He died meekly, as a lamb dies. This was clearly foretold by the prophet Isaiah: "He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter; and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so, he opened not his mouth (a)." Not that he was altogether silent during the last scene of his sufferings; for he uttered many excellent and useful sayings: but he opened not his mouth in repining at the dispensations of Providence; no threatening nor revenge; nay, not one word, expressive of resentment or impatience, escaped his sacred lips. We may observe, by the way, that the eunuch, in the Acts of the apostles, was directed to this very passage of scripture, as a means of his conversion: and Philip, under divine inspiration, began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus Christ. In a word, our Saviour expressed, under all his sufferings, a perfectly quiet, mild, and forgiving spirit. "He bowed his head," says the evangelist, "and gave up the ghost." Thus, he expired in the spirit of meekness, and was, in this respect, the Lamb slain.

2. He was so, also, in the end and design of his death. For he died as a sacrifice, to appease the offended Deity, and purchase our peace with God.

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(a) Isa. liii. 7.

He offered up his life as a real and proper atonement for the sins of an elect world. In this manner, the sacred writers constantly represent the death of our Saviour; and sometimes in express allusion to the emblem in the text. So John the Baptist pointed him out to the Jews: "Behold," says he, "the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sins of the world." The apostle Peter speaks of his blood, that is, his dying on the cross, as the invaluable price of man's redemption: "Ye were not redeemed," says he, "with corruptible things, as silver and gold; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a Lamb without blemish and without spot (a)." When the apostle John had that vision of our Saviour, of which we have an account in this chapter, he saw him under the same lively and endearing similitude, as a Lamb slain in the midst of the throne. And in the text, compared with the 9th verse, the church is represented, in concert with the angels, singing a new song in honour of the Redeemer, saying, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, and hath redeemed us to God by his blood."

In order to shew you with what propriety our Saviour is styled the Lamb that was slain, I need only observe, that, in dying on the cross, he was the great antitype of all the sacrifices which we find mentioned in the Old Testament. For we have abundant reason to believe, that those sacrifices were originally of divine institution: That they were so under the law, is a fact not to be disputed. Now, what was the meaning and intention of such an appointment? Is it to be supposed, that the Father of mercies would take pleasure in the death of the innocent? or that such sacrifices could really atone for moral guilt, or be acceptable to the Divine Majesty? No; the apostle to the Hebrews expressly tells us, that those sacrifices which they offered year by year, continually,

could

(a) 1 Pet. i. 18, 19.

could not make the comers to the law perfect (b); "for then," says he, "would they not have ceased to be offered;" because that, the worshippers once purged, should have had no more conscience of sins. In a word, they were instituted as prophetic types and figures of that great sacrifice, the Lamb of God to be afterwards slain. They all looked to Christ, and pointed out his death as the great atonement. How natural and just, then, is the allusion in the text? What more proper character for our crucified Redeemer, than the Lamb that was slain?

II. I am to point out the fitness of this song, as applied to Christ our Redeemer.

It is justice, and a deserved tribute from the children of men to Him who died for our sins, and who is set down at the right hand of the Majesty of the throne of God: It is an honour which the Father hath put upon Him, that, at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow, and every tongue confess, that he is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Now, this honour is unquestionably due to our Saviour, on the following accounts.

I. On account of his own personal dignity and excellence. For he is not only fairer than the children of men, and, in every respect, superior to the angels; but he is the eternal and only begotten Son of God. And, surely, he who is the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person, deserves to be adored by man. He who made the world, and all things in it, has an unquestionable title to the highest homage and praise of his creatures: "For, unto which of the angels said he, "at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee?" And again, "I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son." And again, when he bringeth in the First-begotten into the world,

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world, he saith, "And let all the angels of God worship him." And of the angels, he saith, "Who maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire:" But unto the Son he saith, "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever, and a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom (c)." But he has a farther and peculiar claim to our highest gratitude and adoration, when we reflect on his assuming our nature into a personal union with his divine nature. In consequence of this, he is not only God, but God and man in one mysterious person. His name is Immanuel, which, being interpreted, is God with us. By this, indeed, he has distinguished his regards to men, and honoured our nature above that of angels. For as the apostle to the Hebrews tells us, "he took not on him the nature of angels, but the seed of Abraham." And does not this render him worthy of our warmest and most grateful praise? With what esteem and affection ought we to honour him, who has so highly honoured us?

2. On account of his astonishing love, in dying on the cross for our redemption: "Worthy," says the church, "is the Lamb that was slain, and has redeemed us to God by his blood."

The nature and the extent of this love of Christ, are chiefly to be considered under this particular. It was of the most generous nature, and expressed by the most unequivocal proofs. It was not extorted from him by any kind of necessity; for he would have been perfectly happy, although we had been miserable for ever. He was not prevailed on by any importunity on our part, far less induced by any thing worthy of his regard. There was no attraction in human nature to engage him to love it; nay, on the contrary, there was every thing about man to render him odious, and to provoke his just displeasure; and yet he loved us, notwithstanding the guilt and deformity

(c) Heb. i. 5, 6, 7, 8.

mity of sin. "When we were yet without strength," says the apostle, "in due time Christ died for the ungodly.—God commendeth his love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us." O, the absolute freedom, the matchless generosity of his love! a love, indeed, peculiar to himself, infinite, like himself, and triumphing over all opposition! What reason, then, have we to say, with admiration and thankfulness, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but to thy free and unmerited love be all the praise."

But, farther, he gave the most unequivocal proofs of his love to mankind. It led him not only to submit to all the miseries of a humble life, but to the torments of a cruel and excruciating death: and this was the greatest proof of affection that can enter into the thought of man to conceive. "Greater love than this hath no man," says our Saviour himself, "that a man lay down his life for his friends:" but he expressed a love far superior to this; he died for his enemies, for his persecutors, for them who were discovering the greatest malice against him in putting him to death. This was an expression of love without an example, and infinitely beyond all comparison. Christ, says the apostle, gave himself for us, the just for the unjust; and what could he give more? He laid down his life for our redemption; and what can possibly exceed, or even equal, this? How unmeasurable then is his love, and how deserving of our constant gratitude! Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.

3. On account of the atonement and satisfaction he made to the justice of God for the sins of his people. All mankind, by nature, are under the condemning sentence, and curse, of the divine law: for it is said, "Curst is every one who continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." Nor is this the condition of the most profligate

profligate and abandoned merely, but of all, without exception, that ever lived on the face of the earth: A state, in which we are incapable of helping ourselves, or affording relief to one another. None of us could deliver himself, or his brother, by giving to God a sufficient ransom. In a word, the redemption of the soul is precious, and, without this atonement, the soul must have perished for ever. But, in this season of our danger, when, as the prophet expresses it, there was no eye to pity, and no hand to help, Christ appeared as the Mediator between God and man; he was made flesh, that he might be capable of suffering; and cheerfully underwent, as our Surety, that curse and punishment which the law pronounced against the sinner, and which we, as transgressors, deserved to have borne. "He was made," says the apostle, "to be sin for us, who, himself, knew no sin. He bore our sins in his own body upon the tree. He suffered, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God:" and in this manner he has given complete satisfaction to offended justice, and secured the peace and happiness of all who believe on him. How infinitely worthy, then, is he of receiving praise, and honour, and glory! when we view him, as suffering on the cross in our stead, enduring the wrath of God, and never quitting his station till justice was fully satisfied, and till he was able to cry out with the voice of triumph, "It is finished."

4. On account of the invaluable blessings he has purchased for us. Your time would fail me, if I were to illustrate, and enter particularly on the enumeration of these. The cross of Jesus is, indeed, the tree of life, which bears innumerable kinds of fruit, and the leaves of which are for the healing of the nations. How much does the apostle express in these few words? "He is made of God, unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption." By his death and suffering, the justice of God is appeased,

peased, and provision made for our pardon and justification. The Holy Spirit is procured to enlighten our minds, and to set us at liberty from the dominion of sin. We have comfortable access to God, and communion with him in his ordinances. The view of death is transformed; the Christian is taught to consider it as an ascending to his Father and his God. And, finally, to the Lamb that was slain, we are indebted for the glorious hope of the redemption of our bodies from the power of the grave, and of their being transformed into the resemblance of Christ's glorious body. For, if we believe that Jesus died, and rose again, we may also believe, that those who sleep in Jesus, God will bring with him. Is he not then worthy to receive power, and glory, and blessing? Does he not deserve our highest esteem, and most elevated praises, not only on account of his personal dignity and excellence, but also on account of his astonishing love, and the rich and precious benefits he has purchased? Instances of regard are spurs to the grateful. Let, then, our souls, and all that is within us, bless and magnify his holy name. Let us, while on earth, anticipate the song and the conversation of angels, and ascribe glory and praise to Him that sitteth on the throne, and to the Lamb, for ever and ever.

Lastly, I am to lead your thoughts to some practical improvement of this subject.

This person, whom the angels and the saints in heaven delight to honour, is considered as possessing no form or comeliness by the world, and is too often treated with disrespect by those who rank themselves among his servants. But, consider what an unworthy and ungrateful part you act. If you discerned real worth in any of your fellow-creatures, you could not withhold your esteem; and you would justly blame yourselves, if you did not secretly value a man of a benevolent and virtuous character: and yet you despise

spife that infinitely excellent and glorious person, the Son of the living God, who is so transcendently worthy in himself, and so endearing in the riches of his grace and mercy. How inexcusable is this guilt! How ungrateful and disingenuous the behaviour! And how just, as well as dreadful, will be the punishment! You expose yourselves to the most threatening danger. The consideration of your own ingratitude, and unworthy behaviour to Christ, may perhaps, indeed, make little or no impression on your minds: But, think seriously, ye despisers of the gospel, what the end of such things must be; for, how can you escape, if you neglect so divine a Saviour? "If he," says the apostle, "that despised Moses's law, died without mercy under two witnesses: Of how much forer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and counted the blood of the covenant an unholy thing?" If your infidelity should make you disregard your future prospects; yet, consider that it will not alter the purposes and decrees of God: for, as sure as there is a God who ruleth over all, and as sure as this book is his sacred word, the time is coming, when he will reckon, in the fierceness of his wrath, with all the despisers of his Son. And what will the sinner do when He rises up? When He judges, what will he answer him? When He proceeds to execute his sentence, how will he escape, or resist, or endure it?

Be persuaded, therefore, I beseech you, as you love your own souls, and would escape everlasting misery, to lay those things seriously to heart, and earnestly beg of God, that he would effectually dispose you, by his grace, to honour and love the Redeemer, and cheerfully submit to his government.

With regard to you, who are the friends and followers of Christ, and who are soon to commemorate his worthiness and love, be careful,

1. To cherish in your minds the most honourable and becoming sentiments concerning him. Think of him, as the eternal Son of God, who, when you were lost and perishing, undertook and accomplished your redemption, as God manifested in the flesh, the compassionate and powerful Mediator, who came into the world, on the generous design of saving you from your sins. View him as the great Prophet of the Church, as the Light of this lower world, who came from the bosom of his Father, to give us the clearest discoveries of his will, and the most gracious offers of his infinite mercy. Think of Him, as the great High-priest of our profession, as suffering, bleeding, and dying on the cross, that he might make atonement for our sins, and obtain for us eternal redemption. Think of Him, in virtue of his meritorious obedience, as our perpetual and prevailing Intercessor at the throne of grace. And, in a word, consider the dignity of his person, and the excellence of his character, his early compassion, the generous design on which he came, and the wonderful friendship he discovered. Let such thoughts as these occupy your attention, that, while you are musing, the fire may burn, and you may remember his death with suitable affection.

2. Be concerned to get your love to Christ raised and inflamed: and, methinks, such an object, as he has now been represented, should engage your esteem, and raise your affection to the highest pitch. Detach your minds, then, from those empty shadows, from this vain and deceitful world, which deserves not the thousandth part of that love you bestow on it; and give your love wholly to Christ, who is so infinitely worthy to receive it. Consider, not only the amiableness of his character as Mediator, but the greatness of his love. "He loved us," says the apostle, "and washed us from our sins in his own blood." And is this a sufficient motive to recommend him to our warmest

warmest and most zealous regard? Let us, then, humble ourselves this day, under a sense of the coldness of our love to Christ; and let us earnestly pray for the quickening influences of the Spirit, to blow up our little spark into a brighter flame.

To conclude: Let us, my dear Fellow-Christians, commemorate the Lamb that was slain, with high admiration of his wonderful condescension and love;—with a sincere and lively faith in his death, as the great atonement, with which God is perfectly well pleased;—with broken and contrite hearts for our sins;—and, finally, with the warmest sentiments of love and gratitude, for all the inestimable and important blessings which he has procured. Let us, then, surround his table with joyful hearts, and there admire, and celebrate his love. Let our souls magnify the Lord, and our spirits rejoice in God our Saviour. And, since he loved us, and gave himself for us, let us love him with our whole hearts, and resolve to live to his praise. And, for this purpose, may the blessed Spirit breathe on us all, that, under his operations, we may anticipate the joy, as well as the work, of Heaven, in ascribing salvation, and glory, and honour, and praise, to Him that sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, for ever and ever. Amen.

SERMON XVI.

ON HYPOCRISY, AND THE DANGER OF IT.

LUKE xii. 1.

Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.

AS we have the near prospect of making a very solemn approach to God in the sacrament of the Supper, it is of the last importance for us to know what manner of spirit we are of; whether we act from a good or a bad principle, and whether the ends we propose to ourselves be right or wrong. Many, it is to be feared, who attend our religious assemblies, and even sit down at the table of the Lord, are of a character altogether different from that which they assume; they have a name to live, and yet are dead; they profess to honour God, while in works they deny him; nay, they disguise themselves after a thousand ways; and, sometimes, even the prospect of death does not remove the covering which conceals their character from the view of their fellow-creatures. But, though such persons may easily deceive men, who can only judge by the external appearance,

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it is absolutely impossible they can impose on God, who searches the heart, and tries the reins, who sees through all their disguises, and has expressly declared, that an hypocrite shall not come before him. It is certainly, then, of the highest importance, even as we value the favour of God, and would be accepted of him, to attend to our Saviour's important admonition in the text: "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy."

The Pharisees were a sect among the Jews who pretended to an extraordinary degree of sanctity. They were very exact in the external parts of religion, and, by their distinguished zeal, they were in high esteem and reputation with the people. But, notwithstanding their pretended strictness, they were nothing but proud and designing hypocrites, who held no character in estimation beyond the limits of their party; for they were spiteful and malicious, full of self-conceit, and unmercifully censorious. In a word, it is hard to determine whether insupportable pride, or deep hypocrisy, was the most prominent failing in their character.

By their leaven, we are sometimes, in scripture, to understand their doctrine, as in Matt. xvi. 6, 12. But here, you see, our blessed Lord explains it, as meant of their hypocrisy; and this he very fitly compares to leaven: for, as leaven insinuates itself through the mass, till the whole be leavened, so hypocrisy spreads through the hearts and lives of men, and corrupts and spoils the very best of their duties; and, therefore, he gives us an express caution against it, "Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy:" a caution highly necessary to be given at all times, and, more especially, when we are called to keep the gospel-feast of the holy Supper with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

In discoursing, then, on this subject, I shall endeavour, by Divine assistance, *First*, To point out to you

you a few distinguishing characters of the hypocrite, as so many marks by which he may be known. *Secondly*, Show you the evil and danger of hypocrisy; and then conclude with some practical application. And, may the Spirit of truth, who has the hearts of all men in his hand, bring the observations which I shall make, home to your consciences, for the conviction of hypocrites, and the comfort of sincere believers.

I. I am to point out to you a few characters of the hypocrite, as so many marks by which he may be known.

1. The hypocrite is actuated by a principle of vain-glory. He frequents the church, and performs the other duties of religion; but it is not with the view of rendering to God that homage and worship to which he is entitled; no, it is to be seen of men. He partakes of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, not to get his corruptions mortified, and the principles of grace strengthened within him, but that, thereby, he may cover his sins, and acquire a name to live among his fellow-professors. He gives alms to the poor; but it is not from love to God, and with a design to imitate the example of Christ, but merely, that he may be thought a charitable person. This is what our blessed Lord teaches us concerning the hypocrite: "Moreover," says he, "when ye fast, be not as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance; for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear to men to fast (a)." "When thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues, and in the streets, that they may have glory of men (b)." The hypocrite performs his religious duties with the utmost diligence in the eye of the world; and is equally industrious in concealing his faults. When you are observing him, he does well; but when you

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(a) Matt. vi. 16.

(b) Matt. vi. 2.

are not observing him, he allows himself in that which is evil. He may justly be compared to an actor on a stage; for he appears in a habit, and with ornaments, which do not belong to him. To look at him, he has the air of an exceeding good Christian; take off the mask, he is a very monster. In a word, the hypocrite does not care for religion or virtue, considered in themselves: the object of his attention is, to obtain the honour and respectability which men bestow on a religious character. Hence,

2. He is, in a particular manner, careful to perform those duties of religion, which are chiefly connected with the external service, and make the greatest appearance in the eye of the world. Thus we find our Saviour describes the Pharisees: "They fast-
" ed very often; for a pretence, they made long
" prayers; they caused a trumpet to be sounded be-
" fore them, when they were about to give their
" alms to the poor; they prayed standing in the
" synagogues, and in the corners of the streets;
" they paid the tythes of anise, mint and cummin,
" while they neglected the weightier matters of the
" law (c)." Accordingly, our blessed Saviour compares them to whited walls and painted sepulchres, that are beautiful indeed without, but, within, are full of uncleanness and rotten bones. We may justly compare the hypocrite to fruits that appear fair to the eye, but are very bitter to the taste, and sometimes poisonous and deadly in their operation; or to those who paint their faces, who, having no native beauty, endeavour to supply, by art, what nature hath denied. In a word, the hypocrite affects a demure look, cast-down eyes, a mortified visage, and a great appearance of zeal; he can pray with much seeming fervour, and external devotion; but, at bottom, he is a wicked person, that entertains sinful lusts and passions in his heart.

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3. A hypocrite is very often determined to act, in matters of religion, by a regard to worldly interest and advantage. Thus, our Saviour tells us, that the Pharisees, for a pretence, made long prayers, that they might devour widows houses. And the apostle speaks of some, "that were men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness (a)." And, indeed, it is too frequently seen, that men put on the mask of religion, and take up the profession and outward practice of it, merely from secular views; some to make a livelihood of it, others to promote their trade and business; and others, to conciliate the favour and friendship of those from whom they have expectations of worldly advantage. Nay, some are such abandoned hypocrites, that they affect to be thought religious, merely that, with the less suspicion, they may cheat and defraud their neighbours. And, alas! it is much to be lamented, that, by those means, they too often accomplish their ends; for men of candour and integrity are apt to judge of others by themselves, and think them equally sincere in their professions. But, how justly may that character be applied to such covetous persons; "They come before thee as thy people cometh, and they sit before thee as thy people, and they hear thy words, but will not do them; for, with their mouth, they shew much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness (d)."

4. Another part of the hypocrite's character is, that he has a great opinion of himself, of his own merit, and of his own piety and devotion. He thinks himself something, when he is nothing; and hence, he takes a great deal of pleasure and satisfaction in hearing himself commended. Sometimes, indeed, he seems to despise praise; but this is only in appearance; his thoughts and his words do not correspond: For he is fond of

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(a) 1 Tim. vi. 5.

(d) Ezek. xxxiii. 31.

applause in his heart; and if he pretend to shun, or fly from it, it is only that you may reckon him to deserve it the more. Nay, sometimes, by a refined stroke in deceit, the hypocrite will speak with hesitation of his own merit and actions; but, if you contradict him not, he is greatly disappointed, and discovers manifest indications of uneasiness: a plain proof, that his censures against himself are only so many baits to catch the praises of others. But, if you go farther, and tell him of his faults, you will not fail to kindle his resentment; and though, for the sake of his own reputation, he may conceal it for a time, yet he secretly indulges intentions of revenge, and only waits for a favourable opportunity of gratifying that malignant passion on the man who had presumed to offend him by his counsels. In a word, whatever religious duty the hypocrite performs, his secret boast is that of the Pharisee: "God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are;" or, like those whom the prophet Isaiah speaks of, he says, "Stand by, come not near me, for I am holier than thou (a)." And this brings me to observe to you,

5. That the hypocrite is very partial to himself, and makes great allowances for his own faults; while he is severe in censuring the character and conduct of his neighbour. Thus we find there were some in the days of our Saviour, who could observe a mote in their brother's eye, but took no notice of the beam in their own. These our Lord severely re-proves, "Thou hypocrite," says he, "first cast the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye (q)." This then you find is a distinguishing mark of the hypocrite: He observes the conduct of others with a jealous eye; not that he may imitate what is good, or avoid what is evil, but merely to spy out their faults, and raise his own reputation at the

(a) If. lxxv. 5.

(q) Matt. vii. 5.

the expence of his neighbours. Accordingly, he interprets and construes every thing they do in the worst sense. In a word, he condemns his neighbour with great severity, while in the mean time he himself is guilty of the same, or perhaps of greater crimes. "But, thinkest thou, O man, that judgest them which do such things, and dost the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God?"

6. and *Lastly*, It never happens that hypocrites are faithful to the interests of religion, in a time of persecution; for, their hearts not being right with God, it is no wonder if they be not steadfast in his covenant. While indeed the sun shines, and the eye of the world smiles on their profession; when religion is the fashion of the times, and they can procure respect or worldly advantage by it; nothing can apparently exceed their zeal and activity in the service of God. But if the clouds arise, and the winds of persecution blow, like dry leaves in autumn, they fall from their seeming steadfastness. And this we find our blessed Lord expressly marks as a symptom of hypocrisy, when, by the emblem of stony-ground hearers, he represents them as only enduring for a while; but afterwards, adds he, when tribulation or persecution arise because of the word, presently they are offended.

Thus I have endeavoured to give you some distinguishing characters of the hypocrite; the marks by which he may be known, and by which we may know whether we ourselves be sincere in our religious profession. I now proceed,

II. To enforce our Saviour's caution in the text, or to show you the evil and danger of hypocrisy.

It is questioned by some, whether hypocrites or profane persons be most hateful in the sight of God, or do most harm in the church. How hateful they are in the sight of God, will appear afterwards. As
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to the harm they do in the church, though it be not so great while their hypocrisy is concealed, yet certainly the character of the hypocrite is of pernicious tendency, when it is exposed in its proper colours to public view. For they lay a stumbling block in the way of others; they harden the profane; they grieve the generation of God's children, and expose religion to ridicule and contempt.—Hypocrites are so hateful in the sight of God, that our blessed Saviour pronounces a woe against them no less than eight times in one chapter, "Woe unto you," says he, "Scribes, Pharisees, and hypocrites (m)." He exhorts his hearers, in his excellent sermon on the Mount, to beware of such as come to them in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravening wolves. And when he threatens impenitent sinners with the severest punishments, he says, they shall have their portion with the hypocrites, in that lake that burneth with fire and brimstone, where there is nothing but weeping and wailing, and gnashing of teeth.

Now, if we inquire into the reason of God's extreme hatred and aversion to hypocrites, we may easily discover it: For,

1. Hypocrites make a mock of God. They affront his infinite knowledge, and think to impose upon him by a specious appearance; for while they honour him with their lips, their hearts are far from him. They have a form of godliness; but they deny, nay they are enemies to the life and power of it. With their feet they tread the courts of the Lord, and even sit at his table, but at the same time they trample upon his ordinances, and prostitute them to their own base and sordid ends. Now, how great an indignity must it be, to offer an affront to the omniscient Jehovah? who requires truth in the inward parts; from whose eye nothing can be hid; who has expressly declared that he will bring every secret thing into judgment.

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This is, in effect, to rob him of one of his most glorious attributes, and to deal with him as if he were a Being that might be imposed on. And must not such a dissingenuous behaviour, such a base trifling with the Almighty, excite his just and dreadful indignation?

2. No other sinner, in so direct a manner, deprives the Supreme Being of that glory and honour to which he is entitled. The unclean person, for instance, is willing that God be glorified; provided he be allowed to gratify his sensual appetites. The covetous man will pay homage and respect to God, provided he may be allowed to retain and increase his wealth. The revengeful person has no objection that God should be honoured; only let him be avenged of his enemy, or the person who has injured him. But the hypocrite, prostitutes every thing that is most sacred and valuable, to procure to himself honour and esteem. Nothing, surely, is more sacred than prayer to God, than religious fasting, than giving of Christian charity, and partaking in the holy supper. But the hypocrite, prostitutes all these; he fasts for no other end, but that he may appear to the world to be a mortified person; he prays, only that he may seem to be devout; he gives alms for the sake of ostentation; and he appears at the table of the Lord, that he may be thought a sincere Christian. Now, what is this, but an endeavour to dethrone the Majesty of heaven, and to exalt him who is created, above that glorious Being who created him? And O how hateful and provoking must this be to Him, who is so jealous of his own honour, and will not give his glory to another?

3. Hypocrites are the more inexcusable, and worthy of condemnation, since frequently, under the colour and false pretext of piety and charity, they seduce, and even sometimes corrupt weak and well meaning persons. And, in this respect, they are more dangerous than those who are openly profane;

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for the openly profane cannot impose upon any but such as have no mind to be religious : Whereas, hypocrites, under a specious outward appearance, conceal the deformity of vice, insinuate themselves into the affections, and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple. I do not indeed deny, that a profane person gives a more pernicious example to the world, and may do more mischief by such an example ; but the hypocrite sometimes does more prejudice to religion, by undermining it, than the profane person by all his open assaults. The former, is an open and declared enemy, and therefore has it less in his power to bring calumny and reproach either on religion itself, or on those who have devoted themselves to the observance of its precepts : But the latter, is a concealed enemy ; he kisses when he would betray, and makes it almost impossible for those who have received no impressions of seriousness on their own minds, to determine concerning the effects of religion on the minds of others. And, finally, it is much easier to guard against such as are openly profane and licentious, than against persons of this character ; because we are ready to esteem them sincere and upright in their profession.

4. The hypocrite is a character which God will most certainly punish with great severity. For, as he cannot be deceived by the most artful appearances, and as he has a perfect knowledge of the hearts of all men, he will not fail, in due time, to make the hypocrite appear in his proper colours. This is what our Saviour expressly tells us in the verse immediately following the text ; “ There is nothing” says he, “ covered that shall not be revealed, neither hid that shall not be known.” The day is approaching when he will take off the mask with which hypocrites are now covered, the mask of all their counterfeited piety, when he will expose them, with all their deformities about them, in the open light of day ;
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and then, instead of that self-applause which they were wont to feel from successful dissimulation, they shall be covered with eternal confusion. Even on earth, there are times when God removes the deceit of the hypocrite, and discovers him to the world. Affliction and persecution have often made him known. But, if he should go down to destruction by a private road, carrying this miserable comfort with him, that no one knows or thinks that he is gone thither; yet the last and great day will expose him to public view; and then it will be found, to his eternal disgrace, that while he thought he was imposing upon others, he was falling a sacrifice to his own deceit; for the righteous and omniscient Judge will then unveil the hypocrite before the assembled world; and all shall point at him, and say, "Lo, this is the man that made not God his hope; this is he that wore a garment of righteousness to deceive; but God has now stript him naked, and all men see what he is."

Having thus shewn you a few of the principal characteristics of hypocrisy, and the evils of it, I shall now, as was proposed, conclude with some practical application.

Since then you have heard what an odious character that of the hypocrite is, let us put the matter to a serious trial, whether we are merely Christians in name, or sincere and upright in our profession. This is an inquiry in which we are at all times much interested; but never more than on this occasion, when we are to make a solemn approach to God in the sacrament of the Supper; for, by this approach, we profess to be his sincere and devoted servants: And if you are not so in good earnest, what a dreadful hazard do you run? Your profession of obedience will be an abomination in his sight, and you will eat and drink judgment to yourselves.—But, on the other hand, if, upon a fair and impartial examination of your

for the openly profane cannot impose upon any but such as have no mind to be religious : Whereas, hypocrites, under a specious outward appearance, conceal the deformity of vice, insinuate themselves into the affections, and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple. I do not indeed deny, that a profane person gives a more pernicious example to the world, and may do more mischief by such an example ; but the hypocrite sometimes does more prejudice to religion, by undermining it, than the profane person by all his open assaults. The former, is an open and declared enemy, and therefore has it less in his power to bring calumny and reproach either on religion itself, or on those who have devoted themselves to the observance of its precepts : But the latter, is a concealed enemy ; he kisses when he would betray, and makes it almost impossible for those who have received no impressions of seriousness on their own minds, to determine concerning the effects of religion on the minds of others. And, finally, it is much easier to guard against such as are openly profane and licentious, than against persons of this character ; because we are ready to esteem them sincere and upright in their profession.

4. The hypocrite is a character which God will most certainly punish with great severity. For, as he cannot be deceived by the most artful appearances, and as he has a perfect knowledge of the hearts of all men, he will not fail, in due time, to make the hypocrite appear in his proper colours. This is what our Saviour expressly tells us in the verse immediately following the text ; “ There is nothing” says he, “ covered that shall not be revealed, neither hid that shall not be known.” The day is approaching when he will take off the mask with which hypocrites are now covered, the mask of all their counterfeited piety, when he will expose them, with all their deformities about them, in the open light of day ;
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and then, instead of that self-applause which they were wont to feel from successful dissimulation, they shall be covered with eternal confusion. Even on earth, there are times when God removes the deceit of the hypocrite, and discovers him to the world. Affliction and persecution have often made him known. But, if he should go down to destruction by a private road, carrying this miserable comfort with him, that no one knows or thinks that he is gone thither; yet the last and great day will expose him to public view; and then it will be found, to his eternal disgrace, that while he thought he was imposing upon others, he was falling a sacrifice to his own deceit; for the righteous and omniscient Judge will then unveil the hypocrite before the assembled world; and all shall point at him, and say, "Lo, this is the man that made not God his hope; this is he that wore a garment of righteousness to deceive; but God has now stript him naked, and all men see what he is."

Having thus shewn you a few of the principal characteristics of hypocrisy, and the evils of it, I shall now, as was proposed, conclude with some practical application.

Since then you have heard what an odious character that of the hypocrite is, let us put the matter to a serious trial, whether we are merely Christians in name, or sincere and upright in our profession. This is an inquiry in which we are at all times much interested; but never more than on this occasion, when we are to make a solemn approach to God in the sacrament of the Supper; for, by this approach, we profess to be his sincere and devoted servants: And if you are not so in good earnest, what a dreadful hazard do you run? Your profession of obedience will be an abomination in his sight, and you will eat and drink judgment to yourselves.—But, on the other hand, if, upon a fair and impartial examination of
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your hearts, you have reason to think that you are not hypocrites, but the sincere lovers of Jesus Christ, with what joy may you approach the table of the Lord? What pleasure may you expect to find in this ordinance? For, how delightful must it be, to draw near to God, as a reconciled father and friend in Christ, and to be assured that we are commemorating His love, who died for our offences, and now appears at the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens, as our Intercessor? Let me then prevail with you, to examine yourselves with respect to this important question; and while you are doing so, look up to God in earnest prayer, that he would search and try you; and enable you, by his grace, to discern what spirit you are of. And, that I may give you some assistance in this examination, I shall just remind you of what has been said, in describing the character of the hypocrite.

Permit me then to inquire, by what motives you are governed. What is your particular end and intention in partaking of the holy sacrament of the Supper? Are you governed merely by custom, or brought hither to avoid singularity? Is it to acquire a name, and to be thought religious; or is it to promote some worldly purpose? If so, whatever reward you may get from men; you are in fact but dissembling hypocrites, and cannot be accepted of God.

Is all your religion public? Are you zealous for God and your duty when observed by man, but indifferent and careless about it, when no eye sees you but God and your own conscience? Can you live in the neglect of secret prayer? or, if you go the round of duties, are you at no pains to engage your heart in them? Do you allow yourselves in secret sins, when there is no danger of discovery, and no fear of forfeiting your reputation? In a word, is it
nothing

nothing but the eye of man that awes you from the commission of sin? If so, whatever profession you may make of religion, you have the evident symptoms of hypocrisy about you.

Have you an exalted opinion of yourselves, your merit and your attainments? Are you going about to establish your own righteousness, instead of submitting to the righteousness of Christ? When you pray with some natural fervour; when you find pleasure in reading or hearing the word; when you acquire a superior degree of knowledge in religion, or live with more external decorum than some others around you; Do these things puff you up with the fond conceit of your own merit or abilities, and make you look down with disdain upon those whose attainments you regard as inferior to your own? Is it the secret language of your hearts,—I am not as other men are, or even as this publican? In a word, are you severe in censuring the conduct of others; while in the mean time, you allow yourselves in the omission of commanded duty, or the practice of known sin? If this be your temper and spirit, whatever you pretend, you are nothing in religion; a criminal self-love is the idol you adore.

Are you secretly resolved to follow Christ no longer than is consistent with your temporal interest? Do you conduct yourselves so cautiously, as to avoid all sufferings for religion? Have you a secret reserve in your breasts, to launch out no farther in the service of God, than to that point, from which you may return with safety to your lives, estates, or liberties? This is a plain sign that your hearts are not right with God; nay, such resolutions as these, such sinful caution and reserve, are an abomination to him, and evidently shew, that you are still completely destitute of every principle of piety and devotion.

Put these questions, my brethren, to your own consciences. Consult your own experience, and deal

impartially with yourselves, as in the sight of God; and if you find, upon serious reflection, that your hearts are false and dissembling, beware of venturing to approach to the table of the Lord; for you will be unwelcome guests there. He will say to you, Friend, How camest thou in hither, not having the wedding garment? And instead of receiving advantage by that holy institution, you will but eat and drink judgment to yourselves. On this occasion, your proper duty is,

1. To be deeply humbled before God, under the sense of the baseness of your hypocrisy. And in order to this, seriously reflect on the odious nature of that sin. To want holiness, is criminal enough, but to dissemble, and pretend to it, when you are not really possessed of it, is double impiety. To make religion, the most excellent thing in the world, a cover to vice, to serve the devil under the cloak of a religious profession, is a crime of the deepest dye, and the most aggravated demerit.

2. To fly to the mercy of God, by faith, in the blood of Christ, for obtaining the pardon of your aggravated guilt. For the mercy of God, as revealed in the gospel, is the only refuge of a guilty soul; and whatever you may be, though the very chief of sinners, if you are awakened to a serious conviction of your sin and danger, you have no reason to despair of relief. There is abundant provision in the gospel, both for the cure of your hypocrisy, and the pardon of your guilt. There have been sinners, whose guilt has been as great as yours, and who have yet been converted, and forgiven, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God; and these will still be as effectual for your conversion and pardon.

And now, to conclude, let us all beware of hypocrisy. Let us remember, that God requireth truth in the inward parts, and that a hypocrite shall not come

come before him; that his all-seeing eye is constantly observing us, and that, in a little time, we must stand before his judgment-seat, where all disguise must be laid aside, and where every one shall be finally rewarded according to his works:

And in a particular manner, let us who are designed communicants, lay aside all hypocrisy and guile, and draw near with a true heart: For this is in a manner the one thing needful; it is the wedding garment, without which we cannot be welcome guests; and it should attend every part of our work at this solemnity. Let us then be obedient to our Saviour's dying command, "This do, in remembrance of me;" not with eye-service, as men-pleasers; but in singleness of heart, as unto Christ. And let us look up to him, and wait on him, in the diligent use of appointed means, that he may purify and prepare our hearts; that so, by his blessing, and the assistance of his Spirit, we may keep this gospel-feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

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SERMON XVII.

ON RELIGIOUS INDIFFERENCE.

Rev. 3. 16.—*So then, because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.*

INDIFFERENCE about religion, or what is nearly allied to it, security and sloth, is a disease which appears to be generally prevalent among all ranks of men. There are many who seem perfectly easy as to the state of their souls, and the interests of religion, provided their corn, wine, and oil, their worldly comforts and pleasures abound. They are, in spiritual matters, as the men of Laish were in civil, they dwell in a careless secure manner. Nor is this the disease of those in a state of nature only; believers themselves are frequently infected with it: they too become frequently indifferent. In this case, the kindness of their youth, and the love of their espousals are considerably abated; they neglect to cherish and improve the grace of God that is in them; and hence their pious and good dispositions, for want of exercise, are weak and feeble; their attainments in holiness are not increased, and their lives do not shine with that bright lustre, which should adorn the doctrine of their God and Saviour.

This, we find, was the prevailing character of the church of Laodicea, the most formal and degenerate
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of the once famous churches of Lesser Asia. Our Blessed Lord, who is the Amen, the faithful and true Witness, charges them, in the verse immediately preceding our text, with this indifferent spirit: "I know thy works," says he, "that thou art neither cold nor hot." They had taken upon them the profession of Christianity; they owned the truths and laws of Christ, and the obligations resulting from them; and so they were not absolutely cold. But, on the other hand, there was no spirit in their religion, no vital influence animating their hearts. Their principles were not lively and active. They did not behave as those who are in earnest in what they profess. In a word, they did not love Christ in an eminent degree, and, of consequence, were destitute of that warmth and vigour, which characterise his disciples. In the following part of the verse, our Lord declares his disapprobation of this temper of mind; "I would," says he, "thou wert cold or hot." As if he had said, you would act more consistently with yourselves, and it would be more for my honour, if either you would entirely quit your Christian profession, or be more in earnest in the practice of all Christian duties.

And then, in the text, he expresses his displeasure at their indifference in stronger terms, and threatens them with utter rejection: "So then, because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth." The metaphorical language employed on this occasion, is strongly expressive of God's hatred against indifference in religious matters, and conveys an awful threatening of the punishment which he will inflict on men of this character.

This unconcerned and indifferent spirit, then, the true character of formal professors, who never engaged themselves heartily in the ways of God, is a spirit which he hates. And this spirit, being evidently too much indulged by us at present, I shall endeavour, by the Divine assistance, to lay before you its nature and consequences,

consequences, by pointing out to you, *First*, Some distinguishing characteristics of those who are indifferent and careless in their religious profession, from which you may know whether you belong to this class of men. *Secondly*, The causes of this indifference in religion; and, *Lastly*, The import of the threatening in the text, as an argument to alarm your fears, and excite you to greater warmth and activity in the service of God.

I. I begin, then, with briefly pointing out to you, some distinguishing characteristics of those, who may justly be denominated, indifferent in their religious profession.

1. Men of this character, are those who have a name to live, and yet are dead; who have too much religion to be esteemed carnal, and too little to be truly spiritual; a generation that has too much worldly wisdom to venture much, and yet are so foolish as to lose all. They are unwilling to forsake truth altogether, and still more so to exert themselves with diligence in following it. The form of godliness they affect as an honour; the power of it they esteem a burden.

They are divided in their hearts and affections between God and the world. Like the Israelites in the days of Ahab, they halt betwixt two, as if uncertain which to follow. Nay, they would fain serve both God and Mammon; though it be true, that these two masters are contrary to each other, and that therefore it is impossible to serve the one, without abandoning the other.

2. Those also are indifferent in religion, who secretly indulge, and shelter any beloved lust and sinful passion under the covert of a profession, or allow themselves to practise them in their lives. A sincere regard to the glory of God, and the interests of religion, operates on every part of the conduct. It influences the heart, and inclines us to sacrifice every licentious desire.

desire. There are men, on the other hand, who, while they wish to serve God, have yet a secret reserve for the gratification of some favourite lust. They are convinced of the propriety of being religious, but this conviction has an imperfect influence on their conduct. Like Naaman the Syrian, they are willing to pay homage to God, while, at the same time, they would gladly indulge in any secret sin, to which they happen to be devoted: "Thy servant," said Naaman to Elisha, "will henceforth offer neither burnt-offering nor sacrifice unto other gods, but unto the Lord. In this thing the Lord pardon thy servant, that when my master goeth into the house of Rimmon to worship there, and he leaneth on my hand, and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon: when I bow down myself in the house of Rimmon, the Lord pardon thy servant in this thing (a)." And yet this secret sin, which they perhaps consider as of little importance, like a worm at the root of a plant, will make them die, and wither at last. The genuine love of God, teaches us to hate every evil and wicked work, to lay aside every weight, and the sin which most easily besets us; and the person who discovers indifference in one point, may be justly said to be indifferent to the glory of God, and to offend in all.

3. and *lastly*, Those also are indifferent professors, who have no hearty concern for the interests of Christ's kingdom, and the salvation of others. Give them but enough of this world; let their corn and wine abound, and it is of equal importance to them, whether religion prosper or decline. They mind not the afflictions of Joseph; they have no sympathy with those that suffer; nor do they mourn for the ark of God when it is in danger. Like Gallio, or rather of a worse temper; they care for none of those things; and, like those in the parable, go their ways, one to his farm, and another to his merchandize. In a word, they are of a narrow, selfish, contracted spirit; and, provided

(a) 2 Kings v. 17, 18.

provided things go well with themselves, in their private worldly concerns, they dwell at ease in Zion, and seek not the things that are Christ's.

These, then, are the distinguishing characters of such as are indifferent in religion; the symptoms of that deadly disease, which the great Physician of souls condemns in the church of Laodicea; and for which, he threatens them with his highest displeasure. I now proceed,

II. To point out to you, the causes that concur in producing this indifferent spirit.

I. Indifference in religion, often flows from too great love to the world. "Demas hath forsaken us," says the apostle, "having loved this present world."—"If any man," says John, "love the world, the love of the Father is not in him;" and where there is no love to God, there can be no zeal for his glory. It is no wonder, that those, whose hearts are devoted to this world, and who have no firm and steady faith of a better, should be indifferent as to the matters of God; for these, as I before observed to you, are two masters, whose interests and commands are so absolutely incompatible, that it is impossible to serve both. This is beautifully illustrated by our Saviour, in the parable of the marriage supper: "When the servant came to call them that were bidden, they all, with one consent, began to make excuse: one had bought a piece of ground, and he must needs go and see it; another had bought five yoke of oxen, and he must go to prove them; and the third had married a wife, and therefore could not come (b)." Thus the pleasures of the world on the one hand, and the profits of it on the other, occupy the minds of men, and render them careless and indifferent about religion: For, while their affections are thus deeply engaged in the pursuit.

(b) Luke xiv.

suit of earthly and sensible objects, they have neither esteem nor inclination for the things that concern the glory of Christ, and their own salvation. For the truth of this, may I not appeal to the experience of many of you? Do you not find, for instance, that the love and cares of the world distract your mind, when you are engaged in the duties of religious worship, and render you listless and inattentive to the spiritual performance of them? Nay, do you not find, when your time, your zeal, and activity, are chiefly employed about the things of this world; when you are most solicitous in making provision for the flesh, either to fulfil the lusts of it, or, with the rich man in the parable, to have goods to lay up for many years, that then you are most indifferent and careless, in the discharge of your duty to God? Beware then, lest the pleasures and pursuits of this world, divert your minds from the one thing needful, and make you careless and unconcerned about it.

2. Indifference, in matters of religion, proceeds often from self-conceit; a proud, overweening opinion of our own merit and sufficiency. This, we find, our blessed Lord assigns as one cause of it in the church of Laodicea. They boasted that they were rich, and increased with goods, and had need of nothing; while, in the mean time, they were wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked. They were contented with the improvement they had made, and considered higher attainments as impossible or unnecessary. And this, indeed, is a natural effect of pride and self-conceit. For, when persons have a high opinion of themselves, of their own merit and abilities, it lulls them into a state of spiritual ease and fatal security; they are careless of their duty, and unwatchful against sin. If you remind them of their danger, and warn them to fly from the wrath to come; if you tell them of their need of Christ, and put them upon applying in good earnest to him for wisdom

wisdom and strength to guide and assist them, and for righteousness to entitle them to eternal life; you speak, as it were, to the dead. They slight those admonitions as needless, or beneath them. They that are whole, that think themselves whole and in health, will not apply to the physician. In a word, a proud, conceited sinner, who fancies himself to be something, when he is nothing, neither prizes the grace of God revealed in the gospel, nor has any true zeal for the interests of his kingdom, but flatters himself in his own eyes; and God is not in all his thoughts.

3. It flows also from want of serious consideration. Men do not attend to subjects of the greatest importance, and therefore, are not fully persuaded, nor have they lively views, of the excellence of that salvation which God reveals to us in the gospel. They do not consider the miseries that are prepared for careless sinners, who despise the offers of mercy and reconciliation through Jesus Christ; nor do they remember, that salvation is the one thing needful, the good part that shall never be taken away; and that they are called to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling. If those important truths received from mankind the attention which they deserve, they would go far to subdue a careless and indifferent spirit. But, notwithstanding those plain intimations, many indulge a vain hope, that it is an easy thing to be saved, and that religion is a work of no great difficulty. They consider not, that the Spirit of God, in the sacred scriptures, gives a different account of this matter. There, we are expressly told, “that
“strait is the gate, and narrow the way, that lead-
“eth unto life, and few there be that find it; that
“we must labour, nay, strive, to enter in; that the
“kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the
“violent must take it by force; that even the right-
“eous themselves shall scarcely, and with difficulty,
“be saved: Where, then, shall the ungodly, and
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"the sinner, appear?" Surely, if men would but seriously consider these things, if they firmly believed them, they would be fervent and diligent in serving the Lord.

4. Another cause of indifference in religion, is, the love of ease, and carnal sloth and security. There are too many professing Christians, who, in matters of religion, are like the sluggard in the book of Proverbs. The language of their hearts is, "Yet a little sleep, yet a little slumber, yet a little folding of the hands to sleep." They indulge themselves in sloth and laziness, and put off the working out of their salvation from one day to another, still resolving; but never setting actually about it. They are like the door on its hinges, that makes no progressive motion; or, if they make any attempts, they are faint and ineffectual. Their goodness, at best, is but like the morning-cloud, and the early dew, that soon pass away. How many are there, even under a Christian profession, who spend their days in going round the same unhappy circle of sinning and repenting, and repenting and sinning; who being thus unstable as water, cannot excel, nor possess any true zeal for the glory of God, or their own salvation. Nay, are there not some who were formerly fervent in spirit, and zealous for religion; but now, bewitched with the charms of ease and indolence, are become dull, and lifeless, and indifferent. Let such persons seriously consider what our Lord says to the church of Ephesus; "Nevertheless, I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love: remember, therefore, from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent (a)."

5. and lastly, Indifference sometimes proceeds from the company with which we associate, and the unhappy influence of their pernicious example. For, if they

(a) Rev. ii. 4, 5.

they be of a careless and indifferent spirit with respect to religion, we are too apt to contract the same temper and disposition. "Be not deceived," says the apostle Paul, "evil communications corrupt good manners." To the truth of this observation, your own experience will bear witness. Tell me, ye that frequent the company of such as are careless and unconcerned about religion, especially if, at the same time, they be profane and vicious in their conversation; Do ye not find, by hearing sin frequently mocked at, and religion turned into ridicule, that your abhorrence of the former is apt to wear off, and your regard for the latter is gradually diminished; in some instances, perhaps, almost extinguished? Nay, I would ask you, who are the children of God; Do ye not sometimes find it difficult, to preserve a spiritual and serious frame, in the company even of sober men, when the conversation turns upon the things of this world? How great then must your danger be, how much more difficult to preserve your relish for the duties of religion, and your zeal for the interests of Christ's kingdom, if you venture into the paths of the ungodly, and sit with the workers of iniquity! Hence is that needful caution of the apostle Peter: "Beware," says he, "lest being led away with the errors of the wicked, ye fall from your own steadfastness (m)."

Thus, I have endeavoured to point out to you, some of the chief causes that concur in producing an indifferent spirit in matters of religion; that criminal disease of the soul, at which our Lord expresses such high displeasure in the text; and for which, he threatens the church of Laodicea with utter rejection: "So then," says he, "because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth." And this brings me,

III.

III. and *lastly*, To explain to you, the import of the dreadful threatening in the text, as an argument to excite your attention, and engage you to warmth and activity in serving the Lord.

1. This threatening demonstrates, that such persons are the objects of his disgust and aversion. He is, as it were, sick of them; he cannot bear them, and loathes their indifference; nay, he reckons a careless professor of his religion, to be worse than an infidel; for, such as know not God, nor the method of salvation through Christ, are not so guilty in sinning against him, as those who know his will, and do it not. This is what our Saviour himself expressly tells us, and, at the same time, subjoins the reason and justice of this proceeding: "That servant," says he, "who knew his Lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes: But he that knew it not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes: For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required, and to whom men have committed much, of him will they ask the more (i)." Pity and compassion is due to those, who walk in the darkness of idolatry, because they know not the way to happiness. But such as profess Christianity, and yet are careless and unconcerned about it, are most justly the objects of Christ's abhorrence; because, under the mask and cover of a religious profession, they are either afraid of keeping his commandments, or betray the interests of his kingdom. A prince exercises more clemency to an open and avowed enemy, than to a subject who has rebelled against his government. Thus we find our Lord does not condemn Pilate with such severity, as the disciple who betrayed him: For he said to the former, "He that delivered me unto thee, hath the greater sin." But he said to Judas, "Wo to that

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Luke xii. 47, 48.

“man by whom the Son of man is betrayed: good were it for that man if he had never been born.” In a word, a careless professor of religion, may call his indifference, charity, meekness, moderation, or what soft name shall be most agreeable to him; but it is a temper more hateful to God, and deserves heavier condemnation, than that of the heathen or infidel, because it is not only baser in itself, but gives an example, of pernicious consequence to religion.

2. and *lastly*, Indifferent professors of religion, are not only the objects of Christ's dislike and aversion, but he will exclude them from his presence, and refuse them the marks of his friendship. This is also plainly implied in the dreadful threatening in the text. He, who is the only Fountain of happiness, in whose favour there is life, and whose loving-kindness is better than life, will for ever exclude them from his blissful presence and love. And were this all, this alone would be a very grievous punishment. But he will also throw them into that place of horror, which is appointed to receive all the impurities of the earth, even the bottomless pit, that lake that burns with fire and brimstone, where the wicked are tormented day and night. Accordingly, we find this is the doom pronounced by our Saviour on the slothful, unprofitable servant: “Cast him,” says he, “into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” A terrible, but at the same time righteous punishment, which should fill us with horror, and make us guard against that indifference in religion by which it may be incurred.

Let us then seriously examine ourselves, whether this be our real character, or, whether, on the other hand, we have a true zeal and fervor of spirit in serving the Lord. It is not enough that you profess much love to Christ, that you call him Lord, Lord, and make high pretensions to zeal for his glory. Nay, it is not enough, that you perform the external
duties

duties of religion, and be forward and active in your endeavours to promote it : For, these things you may do, and yet be careless and indifferent in your heart. We are apt to deceive ourselves in this instance, and therefore we have great need to be jealous and watchful. The inward temper of the soul is first to be considered, and then the expressions of it in the life and practice. I ask you, then, Are your hearts divided betwixt God and the world? Do you secretly indulge any sinful lust or passion? Have you no hearty concern for the glory of God, or the salvation of others? And, provided things go well with yourselves, as to your private worldly concerns, can you live regardless whether religion flourish or decay? If this be the case with you, whatever zeal you may pretend, it is but vain ostentation; and the Searcher of hearts, the infallible Judge of men, will, in the day of his wrath, pronounce you indifferent, and banish you from his presence.

Be persuaded, therefore, ye who are of this indifferent spirit with respect to religion, who care for none of those things, to hearken and comply with our Saviour's advice to the church of Laodicea; "Be zealous, and repent (a)." Awake, thou that sleepest, arise from the dead, and Christ will give thee both life and light. Consider how hateful your indifference is to God, and what aggravated misery and ruin, it will, if persisted in, bring upon yourselves. Bewail, then, your past indifference, and miserable trifling in those things which concern your everlasting peace. Be frequent in prayer to God for the quickening and enlivening influences of the divine Spirit; and, in humble dependence on his promised grace, whatsoever your hand findeth to do for the glory of God, the good of others, and the salvation of your own precious souls, do it with all your might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave, whither you are hastening.

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(a) Rev. iii. 19.

SERMON XVIII.

THE EXAMPLE OF CHRIST, A PERFECT STANDARD FOR THE IMITATION OF CHRISTIANS.

I JOHN ii. 6.

He that saith he abideth in Him, ought himself also so to walk, even as He walked.

WHEN we consider that we are expressly commanded, in the gospel, to imitate the example of Christ; when we survey the fair and unblemished original itself, and reflect on the peculiar obligations Christians are under to follow it; we may justly be surprised, that any who pretend to the Christian name, should live in the careless neglect of this plain and important duty. But, surprising as it is, we need only look abroad through the world, and observe the conduct of mankind, to be convinced that, by many who pretend to be his followers, the example of the Son of God, the great Author and Finisher of our faith, is treated with contempt, or regarded with indifference. Of this strange inconsistency between the profession and practice of Christians, wise and good men, in all ages, have ever complained. But, on what must the blame be laid? On the

the example itself, or on any inability of men to follow it? It is in vain to dissemble the matter; the whole of the blame is justly to be charged on our own unbelief, or want of consideration. But, whatever may be the cause of this, one thing is certain, and can never be sufficiently lamented, that the unsuitable lives of Christians, their impiety and wickedness, has done more real injury to the cause of religion, has brought more scandal and reproach on the Christian character, and been a greater obstacle to the success of the gospel, than the daring attacks of its avowed enemies. Certainly, then, it greatly concerns us, as we profess to be the disciples of Christ, as we regard his honour, and the credit of his religion in the world, to hearken to this important instruction in the words of the text; "He that saith he abideth in Him, ought himself also so to walk, even as He walked."

These words are introduced here by the apostle, in prosecution of one part of his design in this epistle, which was, to lay down some plain marks of the sincere and genuine Christian. With this view, in the three preceding verses, he insists on the observation of Christ's word, or the keeping of his commandments, as one; and then, in the words of the text, he mentions the imitation of his example, as another: "He that saith he abideth in Him, ought himself also so to walk, even as He walked." As if he had said, "Whoever pretends to be a Christian, or, as the apostle Paul expresses it, nameth the name of Christ, is indispensibly obliged, in virtue of this his profession, and in evidence of its truth, to order the whole of his life and conversation, as Christ lived and conversed in the world."

In discoursing on this subject, we propose, by divine assistance, *First*, To show you in what manner we, who profess to be Christians, ought to live, in imitation of Christ's example. *Secondly*, We shall endeavour

deavour to persuade you to comply with this important duty, by some arguments addressed to your consideration.

I. We propose, *First*, To show in what manner we, who profess to be Christians, ought to live, in imitation of Christ's example.

We might here inquire into the manner of our Saviour's life, considered as a pattern for our imitation; we might describe his amiable temper and disposition; and display to you those eminent virtues which were so conspicuous in his character. But, as this would lead us into too extensive, though an important field of discourse, we shall confine ourselves to a few of those divine and heavenly virtues, which were the leading parts of his character, and which, therefore, we should more seriously endeavour to copy.

1. In imitation of Christ's example, we ought to be inwardly pious and devout towards God. This was a distinguishing part of our Saviour's character; his mind was continually fixed upon God, and he maintained a constant correspondence with his heavenly Father. Hence, we find him frequently lifting up his soul in pious ejaculations, and always employing himself in some spiritual and divine exercise. While others were engaged in the business and amusement of the day, or buried in the silence or ease of the night, he frequently retired from the world to converse with his God, and sometimes spent whole nights in that delightful employment. The most exalted piety was exemplified in his life, and the most fervent devotion animated his behaviour; devotion, not breaking out in sudden flashes, like the seed in the parable, which soon sprung up, and soon withered away; but steady and regular, like that all-perfect Being, the object of it, with whom there is no variableness nor shadow of turning.

Is not this a noble pattern for our imitation? It

is true, indeed, we cannot, in this imperfect state, attain to that high degree of fervor and purity, which our blessed Lord possessed; for he was God, as well as man; the Holy Spirit was not given him by measure, but he was anointed with that sacred unction above his fellows. Hence, he had no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth; his whole life was holy and heavenly, without spot or blemish. In this state of imperfection, therefore, it is altogether impossible for us to be perfectly conformed to this divine pattern. But, though we cannot equal the Son of God in the measure of our piety, we may resemble him in the kind; though we cannot keep equal pace with him, yet we may follow his steps. Our love to God may indeed be weak, and, at times, almost a dying flame; but, on the whole, it may be still increasing, and, like the morning light, shining brighter and brighter, till it blaze in everlasting day. Animated, then, by this great example, let us make religion our principal business; let us not continue estranged from God, the Author of our being, whose favour is better than life, and at whose right hand are pleasures for evermore; but let us acquaint ourselves with him, and, by the exercise of faith and love, maintain a constant correspondence with him.

2. In imitation of Christ's example, we ought to be submissive and resigned to the will of God. This was, in a peculiar manner, the character of Jesus Christ. He was the greatest, and, at the same time, the most submissive and patient sufferer, that ever sojourned in this valley of tears. In every age, there have been great examples of the sufferings and resignation of good men; but our blessed Lord has never been equalled, either in the degree of his suffering, or in the resignation of his spirit. In the most distressful circumstances of life, he cheerfully submitted to his Father's will; nay, he was obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Let us then imitate our Saviour in this most necessary virtue.

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While we are in this world, we may lay our account to meet with afflictions. The danger, or the actual feeling of distress, are incident to human nature. But there is one affliction, the greatest of all others; an affliction we create to ourselves, and which doubles every uneasiness; I mean, that stubbornness of will, that impatience under suffering, which is the offspring of pride, and the parent of misery. This is that iron sinew, which will not bow to the will of its maker; this is the strong man within us, who will not yield except to the stronger than he. But, what presumption is it for creatures to contend with their Creator! "The potsherd may strive with the potsherds of the earth; but shall the clay say to him that fashioneth it, What makest thou?" We may indeed exalt ourselves against the Almighty; we may contend, and, from our ignorance of his providence, we may seem to counteract his designs; but let us remember, that none who exalteth himself against God, shall prosper; and that the end is terrible destruction from the presence of the Lord. Let us not, then, foolishly contend with God, or presume to strive with our Maker; but let us humbly submit to his Providence, and, under every affliction, confess that the judgments of the Lord are right.

In this manner, our Saviour himself acted while he was in the world; and we who profess to be Christians, ought to imitate his example. He trod the rugged path of adversity with undaunted courage; he walked on in a course of suffering with the most cheerful resignation; and he did so, that he might go before us in this road of danger, and leave us an example that we might follow his steps.

3. In imitation of Christ's example, we ought to entertain a sincere and cordial love to our brethren of mankind. There is no virtue for which our Saviour was more distinguished; nor indeed is there any in which we ought to resemble him more. His love to the sons
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of men brought him into the world; it was his constant employment, during his ministry, to promote their happiness; and nothing gave him so much pleasure, as to see them hearkening to his instructions, and embracing the offers of his mercy. In a word, the gospel-history is a continued account of his amazing grace to mankind; there we see him descending from his Father's throne, employing his whole life in acts of kindness and compassion, and at last dying, amidst agony and pain, for the redemption of the human race.

Now, in this respect, also, he has set us a noble example; an example, indeed, every way proper in itself to engage our attention, and which is also recommended to us by the highest authority. Our Lord himself proposes this pattern of love to our imitation: "A new commandment I give unto you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another (a)." And, to dispose Christians to acts of compassion and charity, the apostle puts them in mind of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, though he was rich, yet for our sakes became poor, that we, through his poverty, might be made rich. How then can we answer to God, to the world, and our own consciences, if, having such an example of love and charity set before us, and such powerful motives to the imitation of it, we refuse to comply with this important duty? We are not indeed permitted to testify our love to others in the same wonderful manner that the Son of God did: the nature and importance of his character and situation made the expression of his love different. But surely we ought to resemble him in mercy and compassion; we ought to entertain the same cordial love to our brethren, and to express it, by doing them all the kind and charitable offices in our power. Let us, then, copy after the example of our merciful

(a) John xiii. 34.

ful Redeemer; let us be followers of Him who spent his whole life in acts of kindness and love; and, laying aside all malice, and guile, and envy, and evil-speaking, let us love one another with a pure heart fervently.

4. We ought to resemble Jesus Christ, by being humble and lowly, as he was. There is hardly any one part of his amiable character more frequently mentioned in the sacred scripture than this; nor is there any in which he is more expressly proposed to us as an example. He was indeed humility itself; humility without the least mixture of pride, and lowliness without affectation. This appeared very remarkably through his whole life, and adorned every part of his character. Hence, with great propriety, he recommends his own example, in this respect, to our imitation: "Take my yoke upon you," says he, "and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart (b)." And the apostle inculcates humility upon us, by the consideration of Christ's example: "Let this mind be in you," says he, "which was also in Christ Jesus; who being in the form of God, thought it no robbery to be equal with God; but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross (c)."

By such expressions is the imitation of Christ's humility recommended to us in scripture: and surely his example in this respect ought to have the greatest influence on our conduct. He was the eternal Son of God, who possessed every divine and human excellence in their highest perfection; and yet, notwithstanding this, he humbled himself, and became of no reputation. And shall we then be arrogant and proud, we who are but his creatures, the work of his hands,

guilty

(b) Matth. xi. 29.

(c) Phil. ii. 5, 6, 7, 8.

guilty and polluted sinners, and have therefore nothing of which we can reasonably boast? Can we value ourselves on the possession of wealth and riches, or be puffed up, because the glory of our house is increased, when He, who was the possessor of all things, chose to appear in a low condition, and to live in a state of poverty and want? And shall we, whose breath is in our nostrils, despise our brother, and behave with insolence to our fellow-creatures, when the Son of God himself condescended to converse with the meanest, and did not disdain the cry of a beggar? The example of our Lord's humility ought, doubtless, to make us humble; and we may well be ashamed of pride, when we reflect on the condescension of the Son of God. Let us, then, imitate our Redeemer in this most amiable virtue. Let us put on humility as a beautiful robe; and, when we consider how lowly and condescending Jesus was, let us be vile in our own eyes, and abhor ourselves in dust and ashes.

5. In imitation of Christ's example, we ought to be meek and self-denied under injury and reproach. This was another bright part of our blessed Saviour's character. Never did any man meet with greater injuries, or so complicated a scene of insult, to provoke and irritate his spirit; and yet, under them all, he was mild and gentle. When his enemies treated him in the most cruel and injurious manner, when they loaded him with calumny and slander, instead of rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing, he was ready, on the contrary, to repay their injuries with love. Even his bitterest enemies were partakers of his kindness; he still continued to intreat them to accept of life from him, and, with tears of compassion, bewailed their infidelity. And when, at last, his enemies laid violent hands upon him, and gratified their malice with his blood; when, in the extremity of his sufferings, they reviled him, and insulted
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over his misery in the most barbarous manner: instead of resenting so great an injury, or breathing out threatening and revenge, he freely forgave them himself, and prayed on the cross that his Father would forgive them also. Thus meek and patient was the Son of God. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth. He was brought as a lamb to the slaughter; and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth.

Here, also, is a noble pattern for our imitation. It was in order to set us an example, that Jesus suffered with so much patience and submission. It is with this argument the apostle Peter exhorted the Christians of his time, "when they did well, and "suffered for it, to take it patiently, knowing that "hereunto they were called; because Christ also hath "suffered for us, leaving us an example, that we "might follow his steps; who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously (a)." Shall we not blush, when we reflect how far short we come of this amiable example, and resolve, if possible, to resemble him more?

6. In imitation of Christ's example, we ought to regard this world with a generous contempt, and place our affections on things above. Though Christ was the brightness of his Father's image, yet he took upon himself the form of a servant; though he knew the full value of earthly enjoyments, yet he despised them; and though he could easily have commanded the wealth and riches of the world, yet he allowed them to be enjoyed by others. His first appearance was in a mean and low condition. On his nativity, no servile attendants waited, no sumptuous preparations were made. He was born in a stable, and laid in a manger. Through the whole of his after life, he discovered the most sincere contempt for the world, and all its enjoyments. He despised riches and wealth,
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(a) 1 Pet. ii. 20, 21, 23.

the mean grandeur and pride of life; those shining, but deceitful toys, which the bulk of mankind pursue with such activity and ardour. Nay, so poor was his condition, that, as he himself tells us, "the foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man had not where to lay his head (b)." What amazing condescension was this! and how justly may it discredit all the grandeur and greatness of this world!

Vain, foolish men, who mistake their own happiness, are apt to place their affections on earthly things, and to value themselves on a large share of worldly enjoyments; but the Son of God, whose judgment was according to truth, chose to be born in a low condition, and to live in poverty, that he might teach us mortification and contempt for the world.

In this manner, then, we ought to live in imitation of Christ's example, inwardly pious and devout towards God, submissive and resigned to his will, merciful and kind to our fellow-creatures, humble and lowly in every part of our behaviour, meek and patient under affliction, and, with regard to this world, despising its pomp, and placing our affections on things above.

II. We proceed, 2dly, To persuade you to comply with this important duty, by some few arguments addressed to your consideration.

1. Consider, that it was one great design of God, in sending Christ into the world, to set us an example that we might follow his steps.

And here we would not be understood to mean, that this was the only, or even chief design of his coming; for, it plainly appears, from several passages in the sacred Scripture, that the great and principal design which God had in sending his Son into the world, was to reconcile sinners to himself, and

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(b) Matt. viii. 20.

accomplish their salvation from eternal death. Christ came, not merely to teach us our duty by his doctrine, and to lead us to the practice of it by his example, but chiefly to act the part of a Mediator between God and man, to reconcile us to God, and to obtain eternal redemption for us. This, our Lord himself tells us, was his Father's design in sending him: "God sent not his Son," says he, "into the world, "to condemn the world, but that the world through "Him might be saved (r)." But, though this was the grand and principal design of his mission, it does not hinder but that other noble and worthy purposes might also be served by it. Such, plainly, is the case before us. Though God sent his Son into the world to deliver his people from the guilt of sin, and to save them from eternal misery, as the most essential part of his mission; yet he also sent him to lay before us a fair transcript of our duty, in the example of his life, and by that means to lead us to the practice of it. If this then was the design of God in sending Christ into the world, are not all professing Christians obliged, in point of duty, to place the example of Christ before them, as a standard for their imitation? Ought we not, in compliance with the intention of God, to have him always in our eye, and to endeavour after the nearest possible resemblance of him? Consider, God is our Sovereign; He has the justest claim to our obedience; his almighty power and everlasting love have done great things for us: and, does not this lay us under the strongest obligations to serve and obey him? Let us then shew our regard to God, by complying with this his gracious design. Let us follow our Redeemer in the practice of every virtue; and, as we profess to abide in him, let us walk as he also walked.

2. Consider, likewise, that the example here proposed to your imitation, is absolutely pure and perfect,

(r) John. iii. 17.

fect, and so carries in it the force of a law. Every other example in this world, however fair and lovely, is stained with imperfection. But the example we recommend to your imitation, is altogether pure and spotless; it is the life of the Son of God himself, who possessed every divine excellence in its highest perfection, who taught the most excellent and instructive precepts, and whose whole conduct was nothing else but one fair and unblemished transcript of the precepts which he taught. He was holy, harmless, and undefiled; his life was a standing pattern of real and substantial goodness, the very beauty of holiness made visible in human nature. In an easy and familiar manner he conversed publicly in the world. His example, like a light placed on an eminence, was fitted for the most extensive usefulness. And, what is apt to excite our attention, and animate our endeavours, he exemplified, in our own nature, as compassed with sinless infirmities, all his divine precepts. For these reasons, his example is every way fair and lovely, perfect and complete, a pattern worthy of our imitation. Who would not wish to resemble the Son of God, and to follow so perfect an example? If, then, we possess any ambition, let the contemplation of our Saviour's life influence our desires, and inspire us with the most vigorous resolutions, let us endeavour to imitate this glorious original, that so we may be changed into the same image from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord.

3. Consider, farther, That the example here proposed to your imitation, is that of your Lord and Master, your best Friend, and most generous Benefactor. And, surely, this is a consideration that ought to have the greatest influence on your conduct. You profess to be the followers of Jesus; you acknowledge him for your Lord and Master. Is it not then highly reasonable, that you should resemble Him?

The followers of the ancient philosophers regarded the practice of their respective masters more than the precepts which they taught, and were careful to record their actions, in order that they might have the benefit of their example. Were those then so ambitious of imitating their particular teachers, even when in many things they were faulty and vicious; and shall not we, who profess to be Christians, resemble the great Author of our religion, whose precepts and practice were equally perfect? If we profess to be the disciples of Jesus, this certainly obliges us to an imitation of him: nay, it is an honour for the disciple to be as his master, and the servant as his lord. "Ye call me," said our Saviour to his disciples, "Master and Lord, and ye say well; for so I am. If I, then, your Lord and Master have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet: for I have given you an example, that ye should do, as I have done unto you."

But, again, he is your best friend; he condescends to call you his brethren, and he has engaged you by the most endearing acts of kindness: And does not this lay you under an obligation to resemble your great benefactor, and to love him with all your heart? If you have any sense of gratitude within you, this will lead you to imitate the example of Him, who laid down his life for you, and sealed his love to you with his blood.

4. Consider, likewise, how base and dishonourable it is to call ourselves the disciples of Christ, while we take no care to be like him. Nothing, indeed, can be more inconsistent. By our profession of Christianity, we declare ourselves the followers of Jesus, the greatest and most perfect teacher that ever appeared in the world. Now, what is a follower of Christ, but one who hearkens to his instructions, and walks as he also walked? We are, therefore, guilty of the highest absurdity and contradiction, when

when we profess to be the disciples of Christ, and, at the same time, neglect to imitate his example. Such conduct is plainly inconsistent with itself; it is as our Lord beautifully expresses it, to have a name to live while we are dead, or to profess to know God, when in works we deny him. Are we not ashamed, then, to make such an empty profession; and can we expect either the approbation of God, or the testimony of a good conscience? No; such a hope were vain. If we justify ourselves, by pretending to be the disciples of Christ, while we are really strangers to his Spirit, our own hearts will condemn us; and if our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts, and will condemn us also. Be not deceived, therefore; it is a corresponding practice which gives truth and dignity to your profession; without works, your faith is dead, and you yourselves the children of the devil.

Consider, in the last place, that, by neglecting to imitate the example of Christ, we expose religion to reproach, and reflect dishonour on its blessed Author. Of all the arguments that were ever brought against religion, none has made greater impression, than the irregular lives of its professors. This has inflicted the deepest wound, and given occasion to its enemies to blaspheme that worthy Name by which we are called. An impious and immoral professor of Christianity, is the greatest enemy to the cross of Christ. He confirms the infidel in his unbelief; he hardens the sinner in wickedness; and exposes religion to contempt. When they, who pretend to be the followers of Christ, are unlike their Master, and, instead of that holiness for which he was distinguished, are unjust, intemperate, and ungodly; what must the world think? Will they not be ready to say, that religion, and the perfect example of Jesus Christ, are not calculated, in their own nature, to influence the character and conduct of men? I will not pretend.

tend to justify such reasoning; I know it is groundless and unjust: but, let me ask you, Is it not often used? and may it not be expected from the greater part of mankind, who judge of things by a false appearance? If, then, you possess any ingenuity of mind, any tendernefs and regard for the glory of the Redeemer, you will study, by your conduct, to prevent this aspersion. Can you be easy under the apprehension of contributing to such reflections on the Son of God? And will you not tremble to think, that you should be the unhappy occasion of such injuries to religion? Never, therefore, pretend to be Christians, the followers of the immaculate Lamb, while, indeed, you are impious and wicked. Let not the name of God, the honour of our dear Redeemer, and so venerable a thing as Religion, be exposed to contempt, by your inconsistent practice. But, let me beseech you, that you walk consistently with your profession, that you live in conformity to Christ's example; and, as you profess to abide in him, that you walk as he also walked.

And now, to conclude: Would you show yourselves Christians indeed; would you do honour to religion, and adorn the doctrine of God your Saviour; would you retrieve the credit of the gospel, so deeply wounded in the house of its friends, and make your religion appear to the world in its native beauty; in a word, would you reap the joys of holiness yourselves, and recommend it effectually to others: Then, be persuaded to imitate the example of Christ. Study his temper and life, as they are represented in the gospel-history; earnestly pray for the Holy Spirit to form you into a resemblance of Him; and be always rising in a real conformity, till at last you arrive at the stature of perfect men in Christ Jesus. To whom, with the Father, and the Holy Ghost, be everlasting praise. Amen.

S E R.

SERMON XIX.

ON PERSEVERANCE IN THE LOVE OF CHRIST.

JOHN XV. 9.

As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you : Continue ye in my love.

THESE words are part of our Saviour's farewell-discourse to his disciples.

In the beginning of this chapter, he represents the mystical union between himself and sincere Christians, by comparing it with the vine and its branches. As there is a natural union between the vine and the branches, so there is a spiritual union between Christ and believers ; and this union is the cause of fruitfulness in the works of new obedience and a holy life. There are some, indeed, who seem to be grafted into Christ by an outward profession, who, because they are not vitally united to him, derive no saving influences from him, by which they might be enabled to bring forth fruit. These, he tells us, his heavenly Father will lop off, and take away, as unprofitable and dead branches : " Every branch in me," says he, " that beareth not fruit, he taketh away ; and
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“ every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit (a).” And, because all our fruitfulness depends upon our union with Christ, as the fruitfulness of the branches depends upon their union with the vine, he exhorts his disciples, in the beginning of the 4th verse, to continue or abide in him, by the constant exercise of faith and love, that he might be engaged to abide in them by the influences of his Spirit: “ Abide in me,” says he, “ as I in you.” This exhortation he enforces in this and the two following verses, by representing to them, the absolute necessity of their abiding in him, in order to their fruitfulness; the extreme danger of apostasy, or not abiding in him, namely, that of final rejection, and being cast into the fire, as a fruitless branch taken from the vine; and, lastly, the great benefit and advantage they, on the other hand, would reap, by their abiding in him, viz. the full answer of their prayers. In the verse immediately preceding the text, he recommends to them abounding fruitfulness, as that which would redound to his heavenly Father’s honour, and be a manifest proof, both to themselves and others, that they were his disciples: “ Hereby,” says he, “ is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit, so shall ye be my disciples.” And then follow the words of the text, expressive of the love of Christ to his disciples, and enforcing, from the best motive, the continuance of their attachment and regard: “ As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love.”

In these words, you may observe an important duty recommended to us, “ Continue ye in my love.” This may be understood, either of Christ’s love to his people, or of their love to him; or, rather, both may be included, for they are inseparably connected. As if he had said, “ Take peculiar care, ye, who are my disciples, make it your constant study to
“ remain

(a) John xv. 2.

“ remain stedfast in your love to me ; for this will be
 “ the best way to maintain, and keep up, the com-
 “ fortible sense and assurance of my love to you ;
 “ this will establish you in my love, and draw forth
 “ the tokens and manifestations of it, more and
 “ more, to your souls.”

We may also observe the powerful argument our blessed Saviour makes use of to enforce this exhortation : “ As the Father hath loved me, so
 “ have I loved you.” An astonishing expression of the condescending grace of Christ. His Father loved him, who was infinitely worthy ; and he loved his people, who were most unworthy of his love : nay, he loved them with a pure and tender affection, bearing some proportion and resemblance of his Father’s love to him ; a love which, as it far transcends all created understanding, can be compared with no other, but the love of the Eternal Father to his only-begotten Son. Our blessed Saviour, therefore, sets before his disciples, in the text, his astonishing love to them by this lively comparison, as an argument to engage them to continue in his love : “ As the Father,” says he, “ hath loved me,
 “ so have I loved you : Continue ye in my love.”

In discoursing on this subject, I shall endeavour, by Divine assistance, *First*, To consider the love of Christ to his people, as it resembles his Father’s love to him. *Secondly*, The important duty he infers from it ; or, what it is to continue in his love. And then conclude with some practical improvement of what may be said.

I. Let us then consider the love of Christ to his people, as it resembles his Father’s love to him, and observe the propriety and justness of the comparison.

1. The Father’s love to Christ, was coeval with eternity itself. For as they are one, in being and in operation, their complacency in each other is mutual,

tual, infinite, and from everlasting. Thus, we are informed, "That the Lord possessed him in the beginning of his way, before his works of old."—"I was with him," says he, "as one brought up with him; and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him (a)." But, not to pry into this awful darkness, or rather dazzling light, in which God necessarily dwells, far beyond the reach of human thought, let us observe, that the love of Christ to his people, resembles, in this respect, his Father's love to him. For, like the fountain from which it flows, it was from everlasting. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever he had formed the earth and the world; while, as yet, there were no deeps, nor any fountains abounding with water; even then, he rejoiced in the habitable parts of the earth, and his delights were with the sons of men. In a word, no finite mind can fully understand the origin of his love, or trace it back to its first spring. This can only be done by Him, who is himself from everlasting, and who, at one view, discerns the past, the present, and the future. Hence, Jesus our Redeemer, loved his people from all eternity; and, as an evidence of it, he cheerfully undertook to accomplish their redemption, even in the certain prospect of the deepest humiliation, and the most painful sufferings: "Lo, I come," says he; "in the volume of the book it is written of me; I delight to do thy will, O my God."

2. The Father's love to Christ, is a very dear and intimate love. Hence, he is said in scripture to be his beloved Son, in whom he is well pleased; an expression which strongly implies that dear and tender affection, which the Father bears to him. And such, likewise, is the love of Christ to his people, a most sincere, endearing, and intimate love; a love that never was, and never can be equalled. "He loved

"us,"

“us,” says the apostle, “and gave himself for us;” nay, “he loved us and washed us from our sins in “his own blood.” What stronger proof, what more affecting instance could he possibly have given of the greatness of his love? Had he ransomed us by the blood of all the animal creation; had he even given the whole angelic host to die for us, supposing their death could have procured our life; it would have fallen infinitely short of the tender expression of his love, in his giving himself for us, and shedding his own most precious blood for our redemption. Never was there an expression of affection and regard equal to this. Let the Redeemed of the Lord say so, whom he hath saved from the hand of the enemy. And, now that he is passed into the heavens, and far exalted above every name, he is as mindful of the interests of his people, and as tenderly concerned for them, as when he was nailed to the cross, and poured out his soul an offering for their sins. In all their afflictions he sympathises with them. He guides them by his counsel; he comforts them by his Spirit; and, at last, he will put them in possession of heaven itself, when the review of his love will constitute part of their happiness, and be the subject of their song to everlasting ages.

3. The Father’s love to Christ, is an incomparable love; a love, that infinitely transcends our highest conception; and such also is the love of Christ to his people. There is a height, a depth, a breadth, and a length in it, that passeth all understanding. There have been instances of love among men, truly great and extraordinary. Some of the ancient Heathens laid down their lives for their friends and country. But, what were all these in comparison of the love of Christ? Only as the faint glimmering of a taper, compared with the resplendent light of the sun. “Greater love hath no man,” says our Saviour himself, “than that a man lay down his life for his
“ friends

" friends (r)."—" But God commendeth his love to-
 " wards us, in that while we were yet sinners Christ
 " died for us." There must be some real or imaginary
 perfection, some similarity of disposition, or some
 favour conferred, to excite the love of man to man.
 In all these respects, the love of Christ infinitely
 transcends the greatest example of human love.
 There was nothing in human nature worthy of his
 regard; there was no similarity of disposition to ex-
 cite his affection; and he could never have been bene-
 fitted by the highest exertions of mankind. In purity,
 in the disinterested nature of his interposition, and
 in the compassion of his nature, nothing in this
 world can be compared to the character of Jesus
 Christ. Hence, the apostle Paul can find nothing
 in language to express his feeling, and admiration of
 his love; and hence the redeemed of the Lord will
 never cease to celebrate His praise, who loved them,
 and washed them from their sins in his blood.

4. and *lastly*, The Father's love to Christ, is con-
 stant, invariable, and everlasting; and such also is the
 love of Christ to his people. Their love to him, in-
 deed, is often inconstant; alas, too often a sudden
 fit and fall of affection, which burns for a little,
 and then vanishes away. But his love is constant
 and invariable; the same to-day, yesterday, and for
 ever. It is true, indeed, he may seem to forsake
 them for a season, and to hide his face, as it were,
 for a moment; he may withhold the sensible mani-
 festations of his love, and, because of their sins,
 chastise them with the rod of affliction: but still his
 love is fixed and unchangeable, the same when he
 frowns, as when he smiles. In what endearing lan-
 guage does he address them by the prophet Isaiah?
 " For a small moment," says he, " have I forsaken
 " thee, but with great mercies will I gather thee.
 " In a little wrath have I hid my face from thee
 " for

“ for a moment, but with everlasting kindness will
 “ I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord, thy Redeem-
 “ er. For the mountains shall depart, and the hills
 “ be removed ; but my kindness shall not depart from
 “ thee, nor the covenant of my peace be removed,
 “ saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee.” Hence,
 Jesus loves his people with an everlasting love ; a
 love that has made the most ample provision for their
 immortal souls ; and in the happy fruits of which,
 the redeemed of the Lord will rejoice and triumph
 for ever.

II. I now proceed to explain the duty in the text, or
 shew you what it is to continue in the love of Christ :
 “ As the Father,” says he, “ hath loved me, so
 “ have I loved you : Continue ye in my love.”

I. It is to continue in the lively and vigorous ex-
 ercise of love to Christ. It is indeed true, that the
 habit and principle of love, when formed in the soul,
 can never be wholly eradicated ; for it is a divine seed,
 which the Almighty hand of the Spirit has planted,
 and therefore it will never die away or be rooted up :
 “ Whosoever is born of God,” says the apostle John,
 “ doth not commit sin ; for his seed remaineth in
 “ him (m).” But, at the same time, let every sincere
 lover of Christ remember, that though this divine
 principle can never be wholly extinguished, it may
 yet languish and decay. The Christian, like the
 church of Ephesus, may fall from his first love ; and
 therefore, we should take particular care to cherish
 and maintain this heavenly seed, this divine spark
 of love kindled in the soul. In a word, we should
 guard against whatever may have a tendency to cool,
 or abate our love to Christ ; and endeavour, by fre-
 quent meditation and prayer, to preserve alive the
 vigorous exercise of it in our souls.

† X

2. To

(m) 1 John iii. 9.

2. To continue in the love of Christ, is cheerfully to embrace, and diligently improve, all opportunities of testifying our love to Him. For this is the way to maintain our interest in his love, and establish our own hearts in love to him. We should testify our love to Christ,

(1.) By shewing forth the honour of his name, and celebrating his praise: "I will bless the Lord, "at all times," says the Psalmist; "his praise shall "be continually in my mouth." And, in the Song of Solomon, you may observe how much the Church is engaged in this delightful exercise. She has her beloved ever in her mouth, and is still celebrating his praise. In the 5th chapter, for example, where, after many affectionate descriptions of his character, finding his praises to exceed her powers of utterance, she exclaims with admiration, "Yea, He is altogether lovely! This is my beloved; this is my "friend, O daughters of Jerusalem!"

(2.) We should endeavour, as far as our power and influence can reach, to promote the interest of his kingdom in the world. For though he himself has ascended into heaven, he has still a cause and interest on earth, which he has very much at heart. He wants to have sinners saved, his church enlarged and purified, and truth, charity, and holiness propagated among men. We should therefore testify our love to Christ, by a zealous concern to advance this his interest and kingdom. In a word, we should reckon his cause our own, and be diligent in using all proper means to gain subjects to his kingdom, and converts to his gospel.

(3.) We should testify our love to Christ, by expressing a just indignation, and discovering our concern and sorrow for the injuries that are done to his honour: "I beheld my transgression," says the Psalmist, "and was grieved. Rivers of water ran down mine "eyes, because the wicked keep not thy law." It should

should grieve us, and awaken in our breasts a just indignation, to see our blessed Saviour despised and dishonoured by sinners; his precious blood and righteousness undervalued; and himself crucified, as it were, afresh, by the profane and scandalous lives of those who profess to be his disciples: "Many walk," says the apostle, "of whom I have told you often, and now tell you, even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ (a)."

(4.) By shewing kindness to his friends and disciples for his sake. He himself is now, indeed, above the reach of our services. Our goodness cannot extend to him in his present exalted state; but he has friends and relations in our world, who are capable of receiving benefit from our friendship and beneficence. We should, therefore, manifest our love to Christ, by shewing kindness to them, for his sake; and this, indeed, is one of the most sensible and endearing expressions of our love to him; a sacrifice, with which he has declared himself well-pleased. Nay, he expressly tells us, that what we do to them, for his sake, though even the meanest office of kindness, the giving them but a cup of cold water in distress, he will account as done to himself; "In as much," says he, "as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."

I shall only add, that we should testify our love to Christ, by a tender and circumspect, a cheerful and universal, obedience. And this, indeed, is the best, and most substantial evidence of love to him. Accordingly, we find, that he mentions it again and again, as the distinguishing test of our love, and the principal way in which he expects we are to express it: "If ye love me," says he, "keep my commandments; ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you." And thus we should labour, in a special manner, to secure our interest in his love, and main-

tain the comfortable sense and experience of it in our souls. This, our Lord himself tells us, in the verse immediately following the text; "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love." In a word, it is in this manner we may taste and see that the Lord is gracious, and have it to say with the apostle John, "We have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him (b)." But what this is, a privilege how comfortable and enriching, they only know, who are so happy as to enjoy it.

2. To continue in the love of Christ, is to be stedfast and persevering in it to the very end of life. Our love to Christ must not be merely an occasional, but a settled and constant affection of the mind. We are to love him at all times, and in every circumstance of life; in prosperity and adversity; when he frowns, as well as when he smiles. I acknowledge, indeed, there may be many interruptions and abatements in the experience and feeling of our affection toward him. The Christian's love may be interrupted in its growth by the neighbourhood of many noxious weeds; and it may sometimes wax cold through the prevalence of iniquity: yet still, the settled conviction of the believing soul is, that Christ is altogether lovely, and that nothing must come in competition with him. If we become careless and remiss in our love to Christ, an intermission in the exercise of this grace will quickly follow; and therefore, we are under the greatest obligation, to be always upon our guard, and to be frequent and fervent in prayer at the throne of grace, that our hearts may be fixed and established in love. In a word, we must cleave to the Lord with full purpose of heart, walking and dwelling in love, and so rooted and grounded in it, that we may never draw back; but be stedfast and

immoveable,

immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord; forasmuch as we know that our labour of love shall not be in vain in the Lord.

I am now to direct your attention to a practical improvement of this subject.

What reason have we to admire the love of Christ to his people, as it is compared to the Father's love to him? It is a proof of ignorance and weakness, to admire those things which are common and mean; but it is no less an evidence of stupidity, not to be affected with things that are noble and exalted. Now, the love of Christ to his people, is the greatest, the most unexampled love, that ever was; an instance of affection, indeed, so noble and exalted, that, in contemplating, we cannot but admire it. Nay, the more we employ our thoughts on this love, the more astonishing it will appear. Is it not a subject for eternal admiration, that the Son of God, the brightness of his Father's glory, the express image of his person, should love any of Adam's guilty and rebellious race, as his heavenly Father loved him? Justly may we adopt the apostle's words to express our admiration; "O the height, and depth, and breadth, and length of the love of Christ! it passeth knowledge." In proportion as we esteem a favour, our affection should be exerted towards the person who procured it. Now, in consequence of Christ's love, we are preserved from every thing we would most anxiously shun, and we receive every thing we most fondly hope for. We are restored to the favour of God; we receive the forgiveness of our sins; we enjoy the riches of his grace, the assistance of his Spirit, and the prospect of happiness which shall never end. Are not those blessings calculated to preserve in our minds, a constant and prevailing desire to continue in his love?

If your country, or yourselves, were preserved by

the interposition of a brave man, in the hour of danger; or, even though you were not concerned, yet the relation of an honourable deed, would inspire you with some sentiments of delight, in the contemplation of a disinterested character: How then should your hearts burn within you, when you know, that this person is your best friend, that his love was stronger than death, and that he procured the best blessings which God can give, or man receive?

But I shall now address myself to you, who have no love to Christ, and consequently cannot continue in his love.

Consider, I intreat you, the particular nature and consequences of your conduct. In not loving that excellent and glorious Person, whom we endeavour to recommend to your esteem and affection, you in fact declare, that you have no regard to his mercy, that you despise the riches of his grace, and hate his holiness and purity, his justice, his government and laws. You are averse, in the inmost temper of your souls, to the Author of your being and happiness, to that gracious Redeemer, who has done and suffered so much for you, and is still making you the most bountiful offers of his infinite love.

But, is this conduct wise, or ingenuous, or safe? Will God never arise, in the fierceness of his anger, to consume the workers of iniquity? Is their no threatening in the sacred scriptures, if not sufficient to reach conviction to your hearts, yet calculated to make you tremble when you look forward to the Judge of all? If you continue not in his love, on what circumstance do you lay the foundation of your future and everlasting peace. "If any man" says the apostle, "love not our Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema maranatha," *i. e.* accursed unto the coming of Christ. And without all doubt, if you continue without love to him, when he comes to judge the world, he will not take off this curse, but seal it upon you to all eternity,

nity, by that awful and decisive sentence, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the Devil and his angels." O, then, as you love yourselves, and would escape everlasting misery, think seriously on these things; bewail the base ingratitude and hardness of your hearts; and earnestly beg of God, that he would take away their enmity, and dispose them to love the Redeemer.

But, *Secondly*, I shall now address myself to those, who, though they cannot deny that they love our Lord Jesus Christ, are yet complaining that their love to him is fallen under a sad decay, with respect to the degree and exercise of it. Be not discouraged; your anxiety and concern for the coldness and decay of your love to Christ, is an infallible proof that you love him in sincerity. But, on the other hand, beware of sloth and negligence.—You ought,

1. To search into the cause whence the decay of your love to Christ proceeds. It may be, you have been too much attached to the world, to self, or some other beloved idol, which hath drawn away your heart from Christ, and possessed the place he formerly had there. It may be, you have given way to unbelief, to harsh and distrustful thoughts of Christ; and this has had a tendency to cool and abate your love to him. Whatever be the cause, endeavour to find it out; mourn over it before the Lord, and be solicitous above all things to get it removed.

2. Be much employed in serious meditation, particularly on the love of Christ, in reading his word, and spiritual conference; for these are excellent means for recovering your wonted love to him. But, especially, be fervent and frequent in the duty of prayer. Plead with God for the quickening influence of the Spirit, that so your heart may burn within you, and you may be able to triumph with the Church, "This is my beloved, and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem!"

But,

But, 3. Let every real believer, without distinction, every sincere lover of Christ, continue in his love. Be careful to maintain your love to him, by a lively and vigorous exercise; diligently improve every opportunity that may be afforded you of testifying your love, and be steadfast and persevering in it to the very end of life.

This is your unquestionable duty. Your divine Lord and Master has expressly commanded you to do so. Nay, you have bound yourselves in a solemn manner at his table, to be constant in your affection to him, and faithful even unto death. So that you are under the most sacred obligations to continue in his love.

This is what you are obliged to, also, in point of gratitude. For, is not the love which Christ has expressed for you, wonderful beyond all conception? It bears the nearest and most perfect resemblance to the Father's love for him; a love which infinitely transcends the most enlarged comprehension of the highest seraph. Sure, then, if you have any sense of gratitude, you ought to continue in his love. Do you love them who have promoted your interest in this world? Do you retain a grateful remembrance of their kindness? Are you ready to express your gratitude, and shall you not much more continue in His love, who has done and suffered such amazing things for your redemption?

This also is your best and truest interest. For it will be a powerful incentive to every duty, and make you steadfast and cheerful in a course of religious obedience. It will preserve you, when exposed to temptations, from making sinful compliances to the dishonour of God, and the wounding of your own consciences. In a word, this is the best way you can take to maintain the comfortable sense of his love to you, and to have it more and more shed abroad in your hearts.

And

And now to conclude: Would you continue in your love to Christ, frequently meditate on his love to you. Guard against every thing that may tend to cool or abate your love to him; and earnestly implore at the throne of grace, that God, who has been pleased to direct your hearts into the love of Christ, may keep them in his love, till you arrive at the city of the living God, where your love shall be made perfect, and your joy shall be full.

SER.

SERMON XX.

ON STEDFASTNESS IN THE WORK OF THE LORD.

PART I.

1 Cor. xv. 58. *Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord; forasmuch as ye know, that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.*
Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, immoveable—in the work of the Lord.

IT is but too common with many professing Christians, who perhaps have been at some pains to prepare themselves for the holy sacrament of the Supper, when that solemn season is over, to turn careless, indifferent, and slothful. In all similar cases, we would pronounce this conduct unreasonable and absurd. Should a dependent, for instance, who is to be engaged in the service of some great man, adorn himself, for appearing in the presence of his future master; but, after being engaged, neglect the work which he had undertaken: Would not such a breach of fidelity be deemed among men indefensible and unjust? And shall we be guilty of it, against the King of kings, the Sovereign Lord of heaven and earth?

But

But since such unreasonable conduct is too prevalent among the professors of religion, what more suitable to your present circumstances, than that I address you in the words of the text,—“ Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast and immoveable in the work of the Lord.”

Not to take up your time in explaining these words, and pointing out their connection with the preceding verses, we may just mention, by the way, that the apostle here draws an inference from the doctrine of the resurrection, which he had proved at large in this chapter. From the promised reward, he excites Christians, in the text, to attend to their present work. Seeing we have reason to look for a glorious and happy resurrection by the Lord Jesus, we ought to be stedfast and immoveable in the whole of that work and duty which it has pleased him to prescribe.

In discoursing on this subject, I shall endeavour, by Divine assistance, *First*, To show you, what it is to be stedfast and immoveable in the work of the Lord. *Secondly*, Against what we are to be so. And, *Thirdly*, Lay before you, the obligations under which you lie, to be stedfast and immoveable in the work of the Lord.

I. What is it then to be stedfast and immoveable in the work of the Lord?

The original word, here rendered *stedfast*, is in allusion to a man who is seated in a fixt posture, in opposition to one who is moving about and unsettled. The other word, rendered *immoveable*, is indeed nearly allied in its signification to the former; but yet it seems to import something more, viz. firmness and steadiness, the being unshaken in our faith and Christian obedience, by persecutions, and other external temptations; or, as the same apostle expresses it, “not being moved away from the hope of the gospel (i).”

Both

Both the words are borrowed from the wrestlers in the Olympic games, who took up their ground, and fixed themselves upon sure footing, that so they might not be easily moved by their antagonists. Now, this temper of mind, which the apostle recommends to us, by being steadfast and immovable in the work of the Lord, implies in it,

1. Courage or fortitude, in holding fast the profession of our faith. He that is under the influence of slavish fear, never can be steadfast. If we are alarmed at the sound of every reproach, or terrified by the opposition of the world, we shall be in great danger of turning aside from the path of duty, and losing the heavenly prize. There is indeed a filial fear, a fear of reverence mixed with love, which is a noble disposition of soul, and greatly establishes the heart. Hence we are exhorted, "to perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord (a)." But a slavish fear enfeebles the mind, it magnifies real dangers, and creates to itself such as are merely imaginary. The coward often fears, where no fear is. There is a lion, says he, in the way, I shall be slain in the streets. While he is thus filled with unreasonable terrors, the Christian cannot possibly be steadfast and immovable. For courage is a virtue absolutely requisite to the man who would adhere to the practice of his duty; and he who does not see, that he has daily occasion to exert it, has studied the world, and himself, to very little purpose. In the service of Christ, we must encounter with many difficulties and dangers. "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, that leadeth unto life." It is equally true in the present, as in the primitive age of the gospel, that all who would live godly, must suffer persecution. These dangers arise, partly, from the malice and activity of the powers of darkness, partly from the opposition we may meet with from the men of the world, and, partly, from the

(a) 2 Cor. vii. 1.

the deceitfulness and corruption of our own hearts. We have therefore the greatest reason to be always on our guard, and to exert the firmest resolution and fortitude, in order that we may be enabled to withstand in the evil day, and be stedfast in the work of the Lord. In a word, we must deliberately resolve to be for God and our duty; and, whatever be the consequences, apply ourselves with vigour to our Christian work. Of this, we have a remarkable instance in the conduct of the apostle Paul, an instance highly worthy of our imitation. When the Spirit of prophecy had foretold, that he should be bound at Jerusalem, and delivered into the hands of the Gentiles, his friends would have dissuaded him from going up to that city; but, with a generous and undaunted spirit, he replied, "What mean ye to break mine heart? for I am ready, not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem, for the name of the Lord Jesus." This, indeed, was a Christian hero; he would not quit his post, nor make shipwreck of faith and a good conscience, notwithstanding the dangers to which he was exposed: "None of these things," says he, "moves me; neither count I my life dear to me, so I may finish my course with joy."

2. Being stedfast and immoveable in the work of the Lord, implies in it constancy, or an uniform stedfastness in adhering to the faith of Christ.

This constancy is opposed to fickleness and inequality in the discharge of religious duties. It is a virtue, of which no human being can in this life be perfectly possessed. Experience, and the word of God, unite in informing us, that obedience, without any mixture of sin, is impracticable: "There is not a just man upon the earth," says Solomon, "that doth good, and sinneth not."—"If we say," says the apostle John, "that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." In many things we all offend; and if any has the vanity to pretend to

perfection, he has much more reason to say with Job, "Behold I am vile, what shall I answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth." Such an evenness and constancy, however, is attainable in the work of the Lord, as, in the gracious acceptation of the gospel, is styled perfection. To this our ambition ought to be directed. The temper of some men, is chiefly concerned in their devotion. Awakened by some circumstances of providence, they are active and zealous in the service of Christ for a season: they are like seeds which fall on stony places, where they have not much earth, and forthwith they spring up because they have no deepness of earth: but when the sun rises they are scorched, and, because they have no root, they wither away (a). Be not deceived. This is not to be stedfast in the work of the Lord, nor are these the marks of his children. Stedfastness, believe it, is a very different thing. It is what the sincere Christian has habitually in his intention, and his customary practice corresponds with it: "Herein," says the apostle, "do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God and toward men." And if at any time he should step aside from the path of duty, his soul is grieved within him; he returns to God with an unfeigned repentance, and endeavours to walk with greater circumspection for the future.

Lastly, Being stedfast and immoveable in the work of the Lord, implies in it perseverance in the Christian faith and practice to the very end of life. For it is not enough that we begin well, and continue, for a while, to serve our Master with apparent sincerity. Many have done so, who, like our Saviour's pretended disciples, have at last gone back, and walked no more with him; and the Spirit of truth assures us, that they who do so, draw back to their own perdition. But, if we would obtain the promised reward, we must hold

(a) Mat. xiii. 5, 6.

hold on our way, and resolutely persevere in the work of the Lord. For it is only he who endures to the end, that shall be saved. It is to him who, by a patient continuance in well-doing, seeks for glory, honour, and immortality, that God will give eternal life. Let us not, then, be weary of well-doing; for, in due season, we shall reap, if we faint not. Let nothing divert us from the path of duty. Let us be humbled before God, for our former deviations from it; and endeavour, in the strength of divine grace, that, for the future, we shall be steadfast and immoveable in the work of the Lord. And this brings me,

II. To show you against what we are to be so: or to point out some of the many temptations we may meet with, to render us neglectful of our duty, or unsteadfast in the practice of it.

1. The influence of bad example is a source of seduction, against which, in a special manner, we ought to be upon our guard. The power of example is great. The world is governed by it, more than by precept. We have daily opportunities of seeing its prevalence on every rank of men. It is, however, much to be lamented, that the influence of bad example is a great deal more strong and general than the influence of good: "Evil communication," says the apostle, "corrupts good manners." To resemble those with whom we have occasion to mingle in life, is a propensity in our nature, to which we frequently give too much indulgence: It should never extend beyond things that are lawful, or indifferent. Singularity in religious matters, when conducted with benevolence and humility, is the characteristic of a pious mind, and is absolutely necessary, if we would be steadfast and immoveable in the work of the Lord. Let us not then be conformed to this world; but let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering, and and make it apparent to all around us, that, whatever

others may do, we for our parts are resolved to serve the Lord.

2. We must be stedfast and immoveable against the opinion, esteem and friendship of the world. We are apt to be influenced by what others think or say of us. Mankind are naturally fond of approbation, especially the approbation of such as they esteem, and of those upon whom they depend, or with whom they have occasion to converse. And this, if it can be obtained, consistently with the preservation of a good conscience, is certainly much to be desired. "A good name," says Solomon, "is better than precious ointment; and loving favour rather to be chosen than silver and gold (e)." In too many cases, however, it cannot be procured unless upon sinful terms. If we refuse to comply with the corrupt customs of the world, or to connive at the vices of men, instead of their friendship and good opinion, we are in danger of incurring their hatred and reproach. We must notwithstanding beware of yielding to the temptation. It surely becomes us, to offend man rather than God. We must not, for the sake of pleasing men, or to avoid their displeasure, dissemble our religious sentiments, or gratify their sinful humours, by a base and servile compliance. No; we must study, above all things, to approve ourselves to God: for he alone is our Supreme Lord and Lawgiver; it is by his judgment we must stand or fall; and his favour and friendship are infinitely preferable to the esteem and friendship of the world.

3. Against the temptation of worldly interest and advantage. This is an allurements to a great part of mankind; a temptation that is apt to work very powerfully on the necessities of some, and on the covetousness and ambition of others. Riches, honours and pleasures, are the objects of many of our desires, and the springs by which they are actuated. They are instruments of destruction, with which we decline

(e) Prov. xxii. 1.

cline not to be wounded. Instead of resisting, or retreating from the blow, we rush with eagerness on their fatal points. The poison is so sweet, that we drink it in greedily, and will not believe that there is death in the cup. How many have been ruined in their best interests by the love of money, by the eager desire of worldly preferment, and by the insatiable thirst for pleasures which endure not! How many, who once made a fair profession of religion, have, by such inducements, made shipwreck of their faith and a good conscience! "They that will be rich," says the apostle, "fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition: For," adds he, "the love of money is the root of all evil, which, while some coveted after, they have erred, or been seduced from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows (m)." Of this Demas was a melancholy instance, even in the primitive age of Christianity; which made the apostle say of him, "Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world." Even sincere Christians themselves are in great danger of being shaken in their steadfastness by the charms of the world. And, hence, they are so frequently cautioned and exhorted to be upon their guard against temptations of this kind, particularly by the apostle John: "Love not the world," says he, "neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him (n)." Let us beware, then, lest through the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, we lose our first love, and even the things that remain be ready to die.

4. We must also be steadfast and immovable against the persecutions of the world. We live in an age in which the religion of Christ is exposed to contempt and opposition. Our Saviour has forewarned his

Y 3

disciples,

(m) 1 Tim. vi. 9, 10.

(n) 1 John ii. 15.

disciples, to expect persecution; and they are sometimes called, in providence, to take joyfully the spoiling of their goods; nay, to resist even unto blood in the defence of their sacred profession. This, indeed, blessed be God, is not our case at present. We enjoy the liberty of our consciences under the mild protection of a happy government. But, in the uncertainty of human affairs, who of us can be sure, that we shall escape the fiery trial? And, should this happen, we would find it no easy matter to be stedfast and immoveable in the work of the Lord. But, although we should never be subjected to persecution of this kind, a corrupt and blinded world has other means of detaching men from their religious profession. There are many who seem to be weary of Christ and his religion, many who endeavour to find blemishes in his sacred gospel, and even treat the professors of it with scorn and reproach. Now, it is not easy to bear mockery and contempt; to be accounted, as the apostles were formerly, enthusiasts and madmen. This, it must be confessed, is a severe trial to an ingenuous mind. We must not, however, be deterred from our stedfastness by the approach of sufferings, or the ridicule of the world. No; whatever it may cost us, we must adhere with resolution to God and a good conscience. How encouraging to this purpose, but at the same time how awful, are these words of our blessed Saviour! "Whosoever shall confess me before men, him will I also confess before my Father which is in heaven; but whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven (a)."

Lastly, Against the cunning arts and insinuations of busy seducers. "My son," says Solomon, "if sinners entice thee, consent thou not."—"Take heed," says our Saviour, "that no man deceive you."

(a) Matt. x. 32, 33.

“you.” We are not to be, like children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the deceit and cunning craftiness of men, whereby they ly in wait to deceive. Many and insidious are the arts that wicked men employ to make Christians unstedfast in the faith, and to turn them aside from the practice of their duty. This, some endeavour to accomplish, by attacking divine revelation, with the view, no doubt, of sapping the foundations of Christian morality; for, disguise it as they will, the enemies of our religion are not so much offended at the sublimity of its mysteries, as they are at the purity and strictness of its precepts. Others, by the false colourings they bestow on vice, labour to make it appear beautiful. They magnify the pleasures and supposed advantages of a sinful life; while, on the other hand, they represent religion as a dull and melancholy thing; as an enemy to our worldly interest, and of little use, but to damp the joys, and embitter the comforts of life. In a word, by a vicious example, those ministers of Satan endeavour to accomplish the ruin of souls. And, when neither the ingenuity of their arguments, nor the influence of their example are effectual, they sometimes try the force of ridicule and derision. And, how often has this method proved fatally successful? How many, especially in the inconsiderate season of youth, by commencing acquaintance with people of this character, have been induced to throw off every regard for virtue and religion? Let me entreat you, therefore, to beware, lest being led away with the error of the wicked, you fall from your own stedfastness.

Thus, I have endeavoured to shew you what it is to be stedfast and immoveable in the work of the Lord, and specified some of the many temptations to inconstancy to which you are exposed.

III. It remains, *thirdly*, That I lead you to consider the obligations under which you ly to be stedfast in the work of the Lord, and immoveable against all opposition.

You are not left at liberty to be stedfast, or otherwise, as suits your inclination. It is your indispensable duty. God, your Creator and Sovereign Lord, expressly requires it: "Be thou faithful," says he, "unto death."—"Stand fast in the faith; quit yourselves like men; be strong."—"Continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel." Now, these are the commands of God; of God, your Almighty Sovereign: And will you dispute his authority? No; I hope better things concerning you.

But, you are not only obliged to be stedfast and immoveable in the work of the Lord, in point of duty, but also in point of gratitude. Has not God been stedfast to his covenant with you? Have not you uniformly experienced that his providence is kind and watchful? Constancy and faithfulness are no less the invariable characters of his conduct, than attributes of his nature. He is with us, while we are with him; his covenant is ordered in all things and sure. Has not God been ever found of you, when you sought him in sincerity? Has he not been nigh at hand to you, in all that you have called upon him for? And may he not, therefore, justly expostulate with you in any instance of unstedfastness, as he did with Israel of old; "What iniquity have ye found in me, that ye are gone far from me, and have walked after vanity?"—But, consider how constant and faithful Jesus Christ was to you, under all the trials and sufferings he met with, that he might accomplish your redemption. His sufferings, indeed, were such, as would have overcome the constancy of any created being: But, did he shrink back, or faint under them? No; he travelled through the dismal scene

scene with unwearied perseverance. He was faithful to the trust committed to him; till, having satisfied Divine justice, he was able to cry out, "It is finished." If thou, then, O Christian, art unfaithful to him, he may justly say to thee, "I did not serve thee so in the garden of Gethsemane, and when I hung upon the cross."

Finally, consider, that to be stedfast and immovable in the work of the Lord, is your best and truest interest. For, on the one hand, if you are so, you will not only enjoy much present peace and comfort in walking with God, which is the greatest, or rather the only real happiness of the Christian's life, in this world; but you have the most express promises of complete and everlasting happiness in the world to come. If, by a patient continuance in well-doing, you seek for glory, and honour, and immortality, God will give you eternal life: "Be thou faithful," says he, "unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life." Blessed is that servant, whom his Lord, when he comes, shall find so doing. Whereas, on the other hand, unstedfastness will not only deprive you of peace and comfort in walking with God, but is so highly displeasing to him, that he who persists in it, is threatened with utter rejection: "If any man," says he, "draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him." In this matter, therefore, the everlasting interest of your souls is deeply concerned.

If you be unstedfast in the work of the Lord, he may justly be so far provoked, as to give you up to notorious backslidings, to open and gross sins, that will prove a scandal to our holy religion: "My people," says he, "would not hearken to my voice; and Israel would none of me: so I gave them up unto their own hearts lust; and they walked in their own counsels." Tremble, therefore, lest, by your inconstancy, you provoke the Lord to withdraw, not only his strengthening, and comforting, but

but even his restraining grace. Remember, that God is jealous of his glory, and that the errors of those who profess to be his children, are more heinous in his sight, than the sins of others. Remember that awful saying, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore, I will punish you for your iniquity."

Wherefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast and immoveable. Fight the good fight of faith. Lay hold on eternal life, whereunto you are also called, and have professed a good profession before many witnesses. I give you charge, in the sight of God who quickeneth all things, and before Jesus Christ, who before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession, that you keep this commandment without spot.

And now, unto Him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy; to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power. Amen.

SER.

SERMON XXI.

ON ABOUNDING IN THE WORK OF THE LORD.

PART II.

1 Corinth. xv. 58. *Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord; forasmuch as ye know, that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.*

OUR holy religion, if considered without prejudice, in whatever light we view it, will appear amiable and sublime; particularly, if we view it as training us up, and leading us on, to greater and more eminent degrees of perfection in holiness, and, consequently, to higher measures of happiness and glory. "The path of the just," says Solomon, "is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day." In the gospel, our greatest excellency is recommended to us as our duty; and it argues infinite love and condescension in God, to enjoin such duties as have a native tendency to exalt our nature, and prepare us for the enjoyment of consummate felicity. Thus, in our text, we are not only enjoined to be steadfast and immoveable, but also to "abound always in the work of the Lord; forasmuch as we know, that our labour is not in vain in the Lord."

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In discoursing on these words, I shall endeavour, by Divine assistance, *First*, To show you, what is implied in our abounding in the work of the Lord. *Secondly*, What it is to abound always in it. And, *Lastly*, I shall explain the meaning and obligation of the two arguments or motives in the text, employed to enforce this duty, viz. the designation here given to it, "the work of the Lord;" and the glorious recompence of reward that is promised, "Forasmuch as ye know, that your labour is not in vain in the Lord."

I. I am *first* to show you, what is implied in our abounding in the work of the Lord.

By the work of the Lord, we are to understand the whole of practical religion; comprehending in it, the exercise of piety and devotion towards God, of justice and charity to men, and of sobriety and temperance in our own conduct: In one word, obedience to all the precepts, both of the first and second table of the law. "He hath showed thee, O man," says the prophet Micah, "what is good: and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" And the apostle Paul gives us a beautiful summary of this work of the Lord, as taught by the gospel; "For the grace of God," says he, "that bringeth salvation, hath appeared to all men, teaching us, that denying ungodliness, and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world (a)."

Now, abounding in this work, evidently supposes, that there is a principle of spiritual life in the soul, by which it is made alive unto God, and disposed for the sacred duties of religion.—Without life, there can be no activity. A person who is dead, cannot engage in the business of this world; neither can he who is dead

(a) Tit. ii. 11, 12.

dead in trespasses and sins, abound in the work of the Lord. In this matter, I am afraid, a great many professing Christians deceive themselves, and by that means lose all their labour in religion. They attempt the work without a principle of life; and hence, all their performances, however specious, must be superficial. If, then, you would abound in the work of the Lord, let it be your first and principal concern, to lay the foundation in an union with Christ, who is the resurrection, and the life, and from whom alone, this new life and strength for your work is derived.

And, being thus disposed for the exercises and duties of the religious life, abounding in the work of the Lord implies in it,

1. That we should have the graces of the Spirit, in a lively and vigorous exercise. Unless he exert his strength and vigour, a man cannot work in the affairs of this world. In religion, the case is the same. He who indulges himself in sloth, or neglects to stir up the grace of God that is in him, can never abound in the work of the Lord. I acknowledge, indeed, that the spiritual life may sometimes seem as fire under the ashes; that indwelling corruption may prevail, and lead captive to the love of sin and death. But a life of grace, as to the general tenor of it, is active: and it is evident to a demonstration, that a Christian can never abound in the fruits of righteousness unto holiness, unless he live in the habitual and vigorous exercise of the graces of the Spirit: for these are the springs which set all the wheels of religious obedience in motion. The human body is fitted for action by the vigour and flow of the animal spirits; whereas, when they move more slowly, it is feeble and languid. In the same manner, when the Christian's faith in God is strong, his love fervent, and his hope of salvation firm, entering into that within the vail; these graces excite him to diligence and activity in serving the Lord: but when they are weak and decayed, he

becomes careless and remiss in the discharge of his duty; and the things that remain in him are even ready to die.

2. It implies in it actual attainments, and considerable proficiency in those graces, which are the principles and strength of the spiritual life. It imports, that they are arrived at a good degree of improvement and growth, and that this is evidenced, both in the regular performance of religious duties with some measure of peace and comfort, and in encountering difficulties, and resisting temptation with fortitude and resolution. Thus, it is given as a distinguishing mark of sincere Christians by the apostle, "That they have crucified the flesh with its affections and lusts (a);" not only are they endeavouring to do it, but they have actually crucified it in some measure. Nay, it is not enough to have obtained some victories over indwelling corruption; we must go on and weaken this body of sin more and more: and as there are many degrees of holiness before we can arrive at the perfection of it, we must be still rising higher and higher. This is very properly illustrated by the growth of a plant, or of our own bodies. A plant, you know, is daily advancing, till it come to that strength and maturity which are designed for it by the Author of nature; and our bodies are continually, though imperceptibly, expanding, till at last they arrive at their appointed stature. Just so it is in the spiritual life. After the vital principle of grace is implanted in the mind, it will still be acquiring new accessions of strength, until it be perfected in glory. This is the meaning of that saying of the inspired wise man, "The path of the just is as the shining light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day (b)." It is true, in God's children there may be decays of grace for a season. The Christian may walk in darkness, and see no light.

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(a) Gal. v. 24.

(b) Prov. iv. 18.

His graces, like flowers in the winter, may disappear, and hide their beautiful heads. The spirit of life remains in him like the root in the earth; but he abounds not in the display and exercise of the Christian graces. And when this is the case, you may plainly perceive, that the Christian cannot be said to abound in the work of the Lord; nay, so far from it, that, under those decays of grace, he will lament his own condition, and utter that passionate wish of the apostle Paul, when he was in similar circumstances: "O, wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"

Lastly, This abounding in the work of the Lord implies, that, till we have arrived at perfection, we must never rest satisfied with our attainments. However far advanced our present progress in religion may be, we must think, with the apostle, that it is insufficient; we must forget the things which are behind, and press forward towards the mark for the prize of our high calling that is with God in Christ Jesus. Do you excel other Christians; who are weaker in grace than yourselves? Beware of thinking that this is enough. While you are short of the work, your diligence must not be relaxed: and though, indeed, you never can attain perfection, while confined to this valley of tears; yet, it is the object to which your ambition and your efforts ought to be directed. Although you come infinitely short of the perfect standard of your conduct the holy law of God, and of Christ your perfect pattern; yet, you must be indefatigable in your endeavours, you must walk and not be weary; run, and not faint. There are many who promise well for a time; many who outstrip their fellow Christians, who yet, by fainting and becoming remiss before they arrive at the end of their journey, fail of obtaining the prize. What fears ought this to awaken and maintain in our souls, lest we also faint before our Christian race be finished! Let us remember,

member, that he who begins, but does not end in the Spirit, has suffered many things in vain; and that to him only who is faithful unto death, Christ has promised to give the crown of life.

Thus, I have shown you what it is to abound in the work of the Lord. It implies a lively and vigorous exercise of grace, actual attainments, and considerable proficiency, both in mortifying sin, and in positive holiness; and finally, that, till we have arrived at perfection, our zeal and activity must never be relaxed. I now proceed,

II. To shew you what it is to abound always in this good work.

1. There is no time nor period, no condition nor circumstances of life, in which we ought to neglect it. The charms of prosperity should not seduce us, nor the powers of adversity deter us, from abounding in the work of the Lord. When we are in health, we should apply to it with vigour; when in sickness, it ought to be our chief concern. In the days of youth, we should bring forth our summer fruits; in more advanced age, solid piety and religion; and in old age, when the body is hastening to the grave, the soul should be placing its affections on the things which are above. Wherever we are, whether in the house or in the fields, in the closet or in company, Religion should, of all things, be the nearest to our heart, and employ our most diligent care. In the night season, when sleep does not close our eyes, the meditation of God should be sweet to us; when we awake in the morning, we should be still with him, and in the fear of the Lord all the day long. In a word, no danger should prevent us from observing, no consideration prevail with us to neglect, this important duty. We must prefer it to our chiefest worldly joys, and to all the delights of the sons of merr; for we are to seek first the kingdom of God,
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and the righteousness thereof, and other things in subordination to, and only in so far as they are consistent with it.

2. and *lastly*; To abound always in the work of the Lord, implies, also, that we should be employed, at every time, and in every part of our lives, in those particular duties that are most proper and seasonable: "Every thing," says Solomon, "is beautiful in its season." In discerning what is present duty, and abounding in the practice of it, the wisdom and dexterity of the Christian consists. This has often occasioned perplexity to the servants of Christ; and indeed, a great deal of the beauty, peace, and comfort of a Christian's life, depends upon his performing every part of religion in its proper season. It is true, the scriptures point out our duty with abundant clearness and perspicuity; but from the weakness of our minds and imperfection of grace, even in the best, it frequently happens, that the Christian is at a loss to know on which side his duty lies, and so cannot order his steps by reason of darkness. Now, in such perplexing circumstances, the following rules may be of use: 1st, See that your minds be free of all bias from self-love or worldly considerations: 2^{dly}, Depend upon the aid of the Divine Spirit: 3^{dly}, Apply to him by prayer for direction: and, *lastly*, Let the glory of God, the good of his church, and your own salvation, be chiefly in your eye.

You see, then, what it is to abound always in the work of the Lord. It is to abound in it at all times, and in every period of life, in all the conditions and circumstances we can be in; and it is to be always employed as the Providence of God directs, in those particular duties that are most proper and seasonable.

And now, I address myself to you, who have this day been at the Lord's table, and whom, therefore, I

am bound, in the judgment of charity, to address as real Christians. Be concerned, I beseech you, to abound always in the work of the Lord. And, sure, the very designation that is here given to your duty, is sufficient to recommend it to you. It is called the work of the Lord. And, O, what powerful and endearing motives are included in this!

Consider, 1. It is the work which the Lord commands and requires of you. He who hath an undoubted authority over you; he whose subjects you are, by all the ties of duty, interest, and gratitude, and whom you have this day avouched, in the most solemn manner, to be your Lord and Master, expressly enjoins you to abound in this work. Consider, that God is your Creator, who has brought you into the world, and raised you to a rank of being superior to the beasts that perish; that he has preserved you amidst innumerable dangers, and bestowed upon you many temporal blessings. And, as if all this were not enough, has he not provided for your recovery, when you were lost and perishing, and sent his only begotten Son to accomplish your salvation? Now, does not the receipt of so many, and such unmerited mercies, challenge your best and most grateful returns? And what return can be so worthy of him, as obedience to his sovereign command, by abounding in his work? When servants among men neglect their master's work, especially the work of a kind and bountiful master, they are justly charged with indolence and ingratitude: But, here is a Master, who has an infinitely greater right to command, and who is infinitely more indulgent and bountiful than any earthly master can possibly be. Is it not, then, most just and reasonable; does not both gratitude and duty require, that you should abound in his work?

2. The work you are called to abound in, is a work with which the Lord is well pleased, and in the performance of which you are sure of acceptance, for the
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sake of the perfect righteousness of Christ. Nor will you meet with acceptance only; he will even admit you into his favour and friendship. To be the servants of God, is the true honour and dignity of the highest created beings; it is that in which the angels themselves glory. But, if you abound in the work of the Lord, he will raise you to a still more distinguished honour, even to that of being his friends, and admit you to communion and fellowship with himself. "Ye are my friends," says Christ, "if ye do whatsoever I command you: Henceforth, I call you not servants, but friends." Now, what an animating motive is this? Is the favour and friendship of princes so much courted upon earth? are men so diligent and assiduous in serving them, that they may obtain their friendship, a friendship that is so very uncertain, and extends but to a few of their concerns? And shall not the friendship of the infinitely great God; a friendship that is everlasting and unchangeable; a friendship that reaches to all your wants and wishes; nay, infinitely above what you can either ask or think: Shall not his friendship allure you to his service, and induce you to abound in it? Would men but allow themselves to think, it is impossible they could resist the force of this endearing consideration.

3. It is a work in which the Lord will assist and direct you; and therefore you ought to abound in it. Perhaps you are saying, "I am ignorant of this good work; it is spiritual and heavenly, and far, far transcends my darkened understanding." But, be of good comfort; the Lord himself engages to become your conductor: "I will instruct thee," says he, "and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye (c)." He gives you his holy word to be a light to your feet, and a lamp to your path, and his Spirit to guide you into all truth. Are you afraid of your own weakness; afraid that you

you will not be able to abound in the work of the Lord? Hear his gracious promise, in which he expostulates the matter with the slothful Christian, and effectually answers the objection of want of strength: "Why sayst thou," says he, "O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God? Hast thou not known, hast thou not heard, that the Everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? There is no searching of his understanding. He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might, he increaseth strength.—They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength: they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary, and walk, and not faint (a)." Fear not, then: his grace will be made sufficient for you; for his strength is made perfect in weakness.

Lastly, It is the work of the Lord: You should therefore abound in it, because it is a work which he will graciously reward.

And this brings me to the *second* argument or motive in the text, viz. the blessed recompence of reward, that is here promised; "Forasmuch as ye know, that your labour is not in vain in the Lord."

Labour, without a suitable recompence, is not easily endured. He, who is compelled to undergo such labour, will always find it depressing and ungrateful. But he who devotes himself to the service of God, will find that his labours have not been in vain. During the time in which he was engaged in them, he enjoyed a peace which the wicked do not know, and which the world cannot give. Nor is this the only advantage which he reaps from his work. By that work, he is gradually prepared for immortality and heaven; and his soul is filled with transport, from the well-grounded hope, that he shall one day be made

(a) Isa. xl. 27, &c.

made a partaker of the inheritance with the saints in life. And it is this reward in the life to come, this glorious recompence of reward, which God has promised, and will assuredly bestow, upon all who love him, and abound in his work, that the apostle seems chiefly to have had in his eye.

Consider, then, The greatness of this reward. Of this reward we can form no adequate conception in the present state. It is represented in scripture by the most magnificent and delightful images. It is called a crown; a crown of life and glory; a kingdom prepared from the foundation of the world, that can never be moved; an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away. It is designed by the New Jerusalem, the City, nay, the Paradise of the Living God: and, hence, the possessors of this felicity are said to sit on thrones, with sceptres and palms of victory in their hands, and as kings and priests, to reign with Christ for ever. But these metaphors come infinitely short of its dignity: They are used by the sacred writers, by way of accommodation to our modes of thinking; but the object which they are intended to describe, is, in fact, "a far more exceeding, and eternal weight of glory," than we can comprehend.

And, as this reward is inconceivably great, consider, likewise, that it is infallibly certain. If you love the Lord, and abound in his work, you may depend upon it, with the fullest assurance, that it will, in due time, be bestowed upon you; for God himself has promised it. "To them," says he, "that, by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, honour, and immortality, I will render eternal life. Be ye, therefore, faithful unto death, and I will give you a crown of life." Nay, as we are told by the apostle to the Hebrews, "God willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his council, confirm-

“ed it by an oath, that by two immutable things, “in which it was impossible for God to lie, they “might have strong consolation, who have fled for “refuge, to lay hold upon the hope set before “them (r).” And, what this hope is, he subjoins in the following verse; “It is that which entereth “within the vail, whither our forerunner is gone, “even Christ Jesus.” Now, what greater security could have possibly been given you? God is not a man that he should lie, nor the son of man that he should repent. What he has promised, is the result of infinite wisdom; it is what he has power to fulfil, and therefore he will make it good. Nay, though his promise be indeed sufficient security, yet, in condescension to our weakness, he has added the sanction of his oath. And, what more sacred and inviolable than an oath? What oath so sacred as the oath of God himself confirming his promise? Well, therefore, might the apostle, in the text, appeal to the Corinthians themselves, with respect to the certainty of this promised reward: “Ye know,” says he; it is not an uncertain, or probable opinion merely, but ye know, upon the most solid and satisfactory grounds, “that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.”

And, now, shall not this certain, this glorious reward of eternal life, animate and encourage you to be steadfast, immovable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord?

Imagine, you not only see your exalted Saviour offering you an eternity of joy, a kingdom with God, a crown of life and righteousness, that fadeth not away; but that you hear him saying, “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of “life. To him that overcometh, will I grant to sit “with me in my throne, as I also overcame, and am “set down with my Father in his throne.” And, will not this kindle your ardour? Will it not arm
you

you with sacred resolution, and make you redouble your activity and diligence in the work of the Lord? How mean, alas! and sordid are your views, if it has not this effect upon your mind? or, rather, how unbelieving are your hearts, if you have no sense or esteem of this heavenly reward, correspondent to its real excellence and worth? But I hope better things concerning you; and things that accompany salvation, though I thus speak.

Wherefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast and immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord; forasmuch as ye know, that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.

And, now, may the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work, to do his will, and work in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

SER.

SERMON XXII.

ON IMITATING THE MORAL PERFECTIONS
OF GOD.

MATT. V. 48.

*Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is
Heaven is perfect.*

WHEN our Saviour appeared in the world, and claimed the character of the True Messiah, his enemies objected to him, that, by his doctrine, he destroyed the law and the prophets, and loosened our obligation to the duties of morality; an objection, which, if well founded, would have been a just cause of prejudice against him, and more than sufficient to prove him an impostor. But, so far was this from being the case, that the great design and tendency of that religion which he published to the world, was, to form the minds and manners of men to a conformity to his heavenly Father, the unerring Pattern of purity and holiness. He gave us a perfect rule of life, supported by the authority of God, and enforced by his own example. He instituted a reasonable service, a religion every way well calculated for promoting real and substantial goodness, and for raising

raising the hearts of men to the highest pitch of virtue. Of this, the discourses of our Saviour, which stand upon record, give us the most complete evidence. His excellent sermon on the Mount, is particularly a summary of pure religion, containing such perfect instructions, as have raised the admiration even of his most implacable enemies.

But, especially, the divine example is proposed to our imitation, as the best and most effectual standard in order to be perfect. We are therefore required to cultivate a noble ambition of becoming followers of God: "Forgetting those things which are behind, " and reaching forth to those which are before, we " are commanded to press toward the mark, for the " prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus;" and in this manner leaving the first principles of the doctrine of Christ, to be still going on to perfection. But, this is nowhere more expressly required, than in the words of the text; "Be ye therefore perfect, " as your Father which is in heaven is perfect."

These words are an inference from our Saviour's discourse to his disciples. In the 43d verse of this chapter, he takes notice of an excellent moral precept, which comprehends the whole of that duty we owe to our neighbour, but which had been grossly perverted by the Jewish teachers: "Ye have heard," says he, "that it hath been said, thou shalt love thy " neighbour, and hate thine enemy." He then corrects the partiality of this law, and inculcates upon his disciples, the practice of goodness, mercy, and patience, even toward their worst and most malicious enemies: "Love your enemies," says he; "bless " them that curse you, do good to them that hate " you, and pray for them that despitefully use you " and persecute you." And to engage them to this most excellent duty, he proposes the example of his heavenly Father, who bestows the bounties of his Providence upon the evil and unthankful: "That

“ye,” says he, “may be the children of your Father which is in heaven; for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil, and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just, and on the unjust.” And this argument he farther enforces, by assuring them, that unless such dispositions prevailed in their breasts towards their enemies, so far from resembling God, they would only be on a level with the very worst of men: “For if ye love them,” says he, “that love you, what reward have ye? Do not even the publicans the same? And if you salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? Do not even the publicans so?” And then he concludes his argument in the words of the text, “Be ye therefore perfect, as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.”

The duty, therefore, which our Saviour in this place more immediately recommends, is that of imitating God in the amiable qualities of goodness, mercy, and forbearance. Our love to others, must be generous and disinterested, unconfined by partial and limited views; and, with respect to its object, bountiful even as that of God himself. We must be ready to commiserate the wretched; we must show forbearance to the injurious, and a hearty good-will to our enemies. As the precept in the text, however, is introduced by our Saviour as the conclusion of his whole foregoing discourse, in which he vindicates the moral law from the misrepresentations of the Jewish teachers; and as perfection, in the language of scripture, is used to signify every moral excellence, we hope it will not be thought foreign to the design of our Lord, if we consider it in this extensive view, viz. as recommending to us, the imitation of God, in the moral perfections of his nature.

In discoursing on this subject, we propose, by Divine assistance, *First*, To show you, in what manner we are to conceive of God as perfect: *Secondly*, We shall endeavour to explain the true meaning of the precept:

precept: And, *Lastly*, Conclude, by directing you to a suitable improvement.

I. We propose, *first*, to show you, in what manner we are to conceive of God as perfect.

As soon as the mind of man has arrived at the exercise of reason, and is led into inquiries concerning the Supreme Being, the first and most obvious attributes that occur to him, are, his majesty and greatness. These, it is true, will, at first, fill him with amazement only; but if he considers them more attentively, they will excite his love and veneration, as involving in them supreme goodness, and every possible perfection. It is difficult indeed for us, who are finite and limited in our understanding, to arrive at any due apprehension of such a Being. But we should endeavour, as far as we are able, to conceive of him, as infinitely removed from every thing unworthy or immoral; from every kind and degree of imperfection; and as possessed of the highest degree of excellence.

1. We ought to conceive of God, as infinitely removed from every kind and degree of imperfection. Such is the constitution of the human mind, that our esteem for the Deity, and our demeanour towards him, are infallibly regulated by the ideas we have formed of his nature. If we conceive of him, as what he really is, absolutely perfect and excellent, this will naturally produce in us, correspondent affections of veneration and love, and promote such a spiritual worship as becomes his glorious Majesty. But, to ascribe imperfection to God, to blemish his spotless nature with the least degree of impurity, is to strike at the foundation of all religion; it is to destroy the clearest and most essential notion we have of him, and to banish real virtue out of the world. Hence we find the Spirit of God, in scripture, guarding us with the utmost care against every unworthy concep-

tion of God. There, holiness is frequently ascribed to him, and with peculiar marks of distinction. "Thou art not a God that hast pleasure in wickedness, neither shall evil dwell with thee. Sinners shall not stand in thy sight, and thou hatest the workers of iniquity."—"Far be it from God," says Elihu in the book of Job, "that he should do wickedness, and from the Almighty, that he should commit iniquity: yea, surely God will not do wickedly, neither will the Almighty pervert judgment." He is elsewhere said to be "a God of truth, and without iniquity. With him there is no variableness nor shadow of turning. What shall we say, then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid." Many other passages to the same purpose might be quoted; but these are sufficient to evince, that the divine nature is infinitely removed from every thing unworthy or immoral.

2. We ought likewise to conceive of God, as possessed of the highest degrees of excellence and perfection.

We must not pretend to confine his excellence within the narrow limits of our thoughts, as if no perfection, or degree of perfection, could belong to God, but what is conceivable by us. No; we ought to think of him as boundless and unlimited, and infinitely exceeding our highest conceptions. Our imagination is too circumscribed to receive so vast an object; when we have enlarged it to the utmost, it must still remain infinitely short of the truth. We may as well think to measure the waters in the hollow of our hand, and to mete out the heavens with a span, as to comprehend infinite perfection, and extend our thoughts to Divine immensity. "Behold," says Elihu, "God is great, and we know him not. Touching the Almighty, we cannot find him out. Who can by searching find out God? who can find out the Almighty to perfection? It is high as heaven, what can

"can we do? deeper than hell, what can we know?
"the measure thereof is longer than the earth, and
"broader than the sea."

We ought therefore to conceive of God, as possessed of every possible perfection. And this in some instances has been dictated by nature herself. Hence the wisest among the Heathens represent him as the most excellent, and perfect; the greatest, and the best of Beings. And the sacred scriptures, those pure and uncorrupted fountains of truth, every where ascribe perfection to God. In them, he is represented as a Spirit; self-existent; independent; filling immensity with his presence; from everlasting to everlasting; the same to day, yesterday, and for ever; so wise, that he knows the hearts of men; so powerful, that to him all things are possible; so perfectly holy, that the heavens are not clean in his sight; so just and righteous, that there is no iniquity with him; so true and faithful, that if he has said it, he will certainly do it, if he has spoken it, he will make it good; and so abundant in mercy, that, rather than we should perish, he sent his only begotten Son to be the propitiation for our sins. In a word, the most exalted created intelligence can simply adore the greatness of God; himself alone can comprehend it.

In this manner, then, we are to conceive of God, as infinitely removed from every kind and degree of imperfection, and as possessed of the highest degree of excellence.

II. We now proceed to explain the true meaning of the precept, "Be ye perfect, as your Father which is in heaven is perfect."

1. We are not here required to imitate God in his peculiar perfections; such as, his independence, self-existence, the immensity and eternity of his Being; his omniscience and omnipotence. These naturally produce, in the mind that considers them, the most profound veneration, and dispose us to worship and

adore the Being by whom they are possessed. But they are incommunicable to any created being, and therefore cannot be proposed to us as a pattern. To aim at a resemblance of God in any of these perfections, would be the highest arrogance, and most intolerable presumption. Have we an arm like God? Can we thunder with a voice like his? If we look upon the earth, will it tremble? If we touch the mountains, will they smoke? If we command the sun, will he rise? and can we seal up the stars? No: To attempt any thing of that kind, would be to set the Almighty at defiance, and to usurp his throne. To such insufferable ambition it is owing, that the devil and his angels, those apostate and accursed spirits, have felt the thunder of that Omnipotent hand which they attempted to imitate; and are reserved in chains of darkness, to the judgment of the great day.

2. The moral character of God, is the great pattern proposed in the text to our imitation. His holiness, goodness, justice, faithfulness, and truth, are things which we can understand, and in which we are required to resemble him. And they are frequently set before us in scripture, not merely as worthy of our attention, not only to attract our esteem; but to engage us to copy after so lovely an example; to be holy as God is holy, and perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect. This is the fair and unblemished pattern set before us; a pattern of which our minds cannot but approve; and the proper effect of this pattern, is, to excite in us the noble ambition of resembling it.

3. Even in those moral excellencies, we are not required to aspire at an equal degree of perfection with God. No: the highest possible attainments of the most exalted intelligences, are infinitely mean, in comparison of Him. The Lord God Almighty, the King of Saints, only is holy. The heavens themselves

are not clean in his sight; and his angels he charges with folly. Is it then possible, that mortal man should attain to perfection? Is it possible, that dust and ashes, who may say to corruption, Thou art my father, and to the worm, Thou art my mother and sister: Is it possible that we, who are conceived in sin, and brought forth in iniquity; whose faculties are so imperfect, and whose affections are so depraved: Is it possible that we should arrive at an equal degree of perfection with our Maker? No; if we should justify ourselves, our own mouths would condemn us; if we should say we are perfect, they also would prove us perverse. An equality with God, in his moral perfections, is not to be attained, either by the spirits of just men made perfect, or the highest angels in heaven; and, therefore, such equality cannot be intended by the text.

But that which our Saviour requires, is a sincere and prevailing love to God; and, as the genuine effects of it, a vigorous imitation of Him, in his moral perfections.

The affection of love to God arises in the mind, from the consideration of Infinite goodness, directed by the most perfect wisdom, having always for its object the happiness of its creatures. Hence, the highest opinion of the worth and excellence of the Divine nature, is absolutely necessary to kindle this heavenly affection in the heart. And hence, also, the well-disposed mind is induced to follow such a perfect character, and secretly wishes for the possession of the same qualities. But it is the assurance, or, at least, the hope of an interest in his favour, that begets our warmest affections. It is the contemplation of him as the Father of mercies, as our God reconciled in Christ, that excites our most affectionate esteem, and inspires us with the wish of resembling him. For love is an assimilating principle, which produces on the soul a resemblance of its object. When the love of God is shed:

shed abroad in the heart, it naturally transforms us into his image and likeness; or, as the apostle expresses it, "Beholding, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, we are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord." The soul that is actuated by this Divine principle, views the character of God as that perfect pattern, to which its temper and conduct ought to be conformed. It is true, in this state of mortality, our resemblance to the Deity must, after all our exertions, be very imperfect; but still we ought to be endeavouring to advance in the scale of virtue, and make progress in perfection. A perfect and complete example is set before us, that, by aiming at that which is most excellent, we may arrive at the greatest height in religion of which our natures are capable.

Thus, then, you see the meaning of the precept in the text. Our Saviour requires us to cultivate a sincere and prevailing love to God, and to be continually aspiring after a nearer and more perfect resemblance of him.

It now only remains that we direct you to a suitable improvement.

1. How amiable and excellent is the religion of Jesus! How gloriously distinguished from the ancient religions of the heathen world, and from those that now prevail in the dark places of the earth, which are full of the habitations of cruelty! What unworthy conceptions had the heathens of their gods! How corrupt and vicious was their worship! Their religious rites were inhuman and barbarous; and their manners agreeable to the characters of their gods. But the gospel gives us the most rational and consistent notions of the Supreme Being. It establishes his perfect holiness, and his abhorrence of all manner of sin. By what lovely titles is he represented in the New Testament! How does it abound with declarations of his
love

love to the children of men ! He is described as a pure Spirit, infinitely perfect, the Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in all ; the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ ; the Father of mercies, and God of all consolation ; nay, he is said to be Love itself, and to dwell in love.

2. The best, and most substantial practice of religion, consists in the imitation of God's moral perfections, those Divine qualities which the scripture comprehends under the name of Holiness. In the imitation of God in these qualities, pure and undefiled religion consists. Of this, even some of the wiser heathens were sensible ; and the holy scriptures often represent it as the end and design of the gospel. How much, therefore, is it to be wished, that none who pretend to religion would substitute, in the room of this perfection, either that which is merely external, as an outward profession and the enjoyment of church-privileges, or those things which are rather the means of religion, than religion itself.

3. Let us reverence and adore this all-perfect God. He is infinitely removed from every kind and degree of imperfection, and possessed of the highest excellence. How ought our souls, then, to prostrate themselves before him ! With what seriousness and veneration ought we to worship him ! With what reverence and humility should we, at all times, think and speak of him ! Worldly grandeur excites our admiration ; the thoughts of earthly majesty compose us to reverence : How much more should these effects be produced by those excellencies which are infinitely beyond our comprehension ? Let us, therefore, admire and venerate the All-perfect JEHOVAH. Let us particularly beware of pronouncing his sacred Name in a careless manner, and of profaning his holy day. Let us tremble at the thought that we have sinned against him, and be concerned, for the future, to love him

him with all our hearts, and serve him with submission and cheerfulness.

Lastly, Let us all be exhorted to imitate God in his imitable perfections; such as, his holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.

(1.) Let us imitate him in his purity and holiness: "As he," says the apostle, "who has called you, is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation." Holiness is a perfection frequently ascribed to God in scripture. He is styled, Glorious in holiness, the Holy One of Israel. Holiness is the beauty of his nature, and the glory of his other perfections. Let us, then, endeavour to resemble him in it: "I am the Lord your God," says he to the children of Israel: "ye shall therefore sanctify yourselves; and ye shall be holy, for I am holy (a)." Let us, therefore, cultivate a deep and rooted aversion to all manner of sin, since it is that abominable thing which God hates with a perfect hatred; and let us daily aspire after that holiness, that purity of heart and life, which alone is the image of God, and the beginning of future happiness.

(2.) In his justice or righteousness. This perfection is also frequently ascribed to God in scripture, and so constantly supposed to belong to him, that he appeals to the reason and judgment of mankind, for the equity of his conduct. Not but that clouds and darkness may sometimes be round about him; it may be often difficult to reconcile the dispensations of his providence with his perfections, or one providence with another: still, however, justice and judgment are the habitation of his throne. Let us then endeavour to resemble God in this venerable attribute. And, how shall we do so, but by being strictly just and righteous as he is? Let us then render to all their due: let us give to God that religious fear, worship and obedience, which we owe him. Let us never

(a) Lev. xi. 44.

never do that to another, which we would not that another should do unto us. Let us not deceive or defraud our brother, in any matter; and if we are called to determine controversies, let us always judge righteous judgment. Thus we shall approve ourselves to God, through Jesus Christ: For the Righteous Lord loveth righteousness, his countenance doth behold the upright. Nay, this is the distinguishing character of his children: "In this," says the apostle John, "the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doth not righteousness, is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother (a)."

(3.) In his goodness, love, and mercy. These are illustrious attributes of God, in which he particularly glories. He is good to all; his tender mercies are over all his works; creation, providence, and redemption abound with discoveries of it. He is rich in mercy to the miserable; his grace triumphs over great unworthiness, and confers benefits on the vilest offenders. Here, then, is a pattern worthy of our imitation; an example so amiable and attractive, that methinks it should immediately engage our attention. But, besides this, it is also recommended to us by the highest authority: "Beloved," says the apostle John, "let us love one another; for love is of God," nay, "God is love."—Be ye kind one to another," says the apostle Paul, "tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God, for Christ's sake, hath forgiven you." Shall any then pretend to resemble God, who is destitute of kind affections to his fellow-creatures?

(4.) In his truth and faithfulness. Truth and faithfulness are Divine perfections; but falsehood and deceit are properties of the devil. Would you then resemble God? Be true and faithful. Never give that to another, as truth, which you know to be false,

(a) 1 John iii. 10.

false, with an intention to deceive him. Never invoke the God of Truth to bear witness to a falsehood; for this is one of the most aggravated provocations you can give him. But let us, on the contrary, inwardly abhor all manner of falsehood and dissimulation. Putting away lying, let us speak the truth every man to his neighbour, and be religiously careful to fulfil our engagements, and perform our promises, especially those made in the presence of God. "When thou vowest a vow," says Solomon, "defer not."

And, now, to conclude, would you show yourselves Christians indeed? Would you do honour to religion, and adorn the doctrine of God your Saviour? Would you retrieve the credit of your profession, and make your religion appear to the world in its native beauty? In a word, would you reap the joys of holiness yourselves, and recommend it effectually to others? Then be persuaded to imitate God in his moral perfections: pray for the Holy Spirit to form you into a resemblance of him, and be always rising in a real conformity, till at last you arrive at the stature of perfect men in Christ Jesus.

SER.

SERMON XXIII.

ON SATAN'S TEMPTATIONS, AND THE MANNER OF RESISTING THEM.

EPHES. vi. ii.

Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

THE devil is the professed and inveterate enemy of mankind. Ever since his apostasy from God, partly out of enmity to him, and partly from envy to men, he has made it his business to seduce them to sin. This is the chief thing at which he aims; the end of all his endeavours; because by this means he knows that he will make us wretched and miserable like himself. But, in the accomplishment of this, who can describe the various artifices which he employs? From his subtilty and deceitfulness, he is styled in scripture the Old Serpent; and we are told that he can transform himself into an angel of light. His superior strength is implied in his titles of "Prince of the power of the air," and "Ruler of the darkness of this world." His malice is implacable. His activity is unceasing and unwearied. He is represented in scripture, as going a-

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bout continually, like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Hence, we have the greatest reason to be always on our guard; and, as the apostle exhorts us in the text, to "put on the whole armour of God, that we may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil."

By the wiles of the devil, we are evidently to understand his temptations; they are called his wiles, because of the subtilty and cunning he employs in seducing men; and, for the same reason, they are elsewhere styled his snares and devices. That we may be able to withstand and repel these, we are exhorted to put on the whole armour of God. The apostle, in this and the following verses, compares Christians to soldiers; and the methods of their defence against the powers of darkness, to the proper use of such arms as were anciently used in war; and by these it is evident he means the graces of the Christian life; for, in the 14th verse, and downwards, he mentions those graces as the Christian's spiritual armour: And here in the text, he exhorts us to put them on; that is, to have them not only implanted in our souls, to be as it were clothed with them like a soldier, who is completely armed for the day of battle, but to have them in constant readiness for repelling the attacks of the enemy.

In farther discoursing on this subject, I shall endeavour, by Divine assistance, *First*, To give you some account of Satan's temptations, which the apostle in the text calls his wiles: *Secondly*, Explain to you the method of defence and resistance to which we are here directed: and, *Lastly*, Conclude with a short practical improvement.

I. I begin, then, with giving you some account of Satan's temptations.

The temptations of Satan are of various kinds; but the great intention of them all, is to defeat the gracious

gracious design of God for the recovery and salvation of mankind; for he beholds with aversion every thing that tends either to the glory of God, or the happiness of man. I pretend not to give a full account of the various temptations which proceed from the art and malice of our spiritual enemies: all I design is, to give a few instances, by which we may understand something of his wicked devices, and thereby be enabled to trace the designs of our great enemy, and our own danger, in an infinite variety of cases which we cannot pretend to enumerate.

1. He sometimes tempts men to doubt, or practically to deny the being or attributes of God. Of this we have a remarkable instance recorded in the sacred scriptures. When Ananias and Sapphira attempted to deceive the apostles, by bringing only a part of the price of the land they had sold, by which they in effect denied the infinite knowledge of God, Satan is said to have filled their hearts for the purpose of inciting them to do so: "Why," says Peter, "hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, in keeping back part of the price of the land (r)?" This kind of temptation he so frequently uses, that our Saviour calls him a liar from the beginning, and the father of lies. Such, therefore, as are addicted to this abominable vice, would do well to consider whence it comes, and whom they imitate and serve.—Sometimes, again, he tempts men to deny the power of God, or to distrust that powerful Providence, which is their surest guard and protection. Thus he is said to have provoked David to number Israel (s). That a king should know the number and strength of his subjects, appears, when considered in itself, to be innocent and prudent. But God, who sees not as man sees, knew that this action of the king proceeded from vainglory, and confidence in the arm of flesh. And this shews us, that even the

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doing

(r) Acts v. 3.

(s) 1 Chron. xxi. 1.

doing things harmless in themselves, may proceed from the temptation of Satan, when the principles by which we are actuated, and the ends we have in view are not sincere and upright. At other times, he tempts mankind to call in question the goodness of God. This was the manner in which he tempted our first parents: "God knoweth," says he, "that in the day ye eat thereof, your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil." As if he had said, however gracious you may think God is to you, yet you are capable of much greater honour and happiness than that which he has allowed you to possess, even an honour and happiness like his own; and because he grudges this to you, he restrains you from eating of the fruit of this tree, which would confer it.—To give only one instance more: Satan tempts men, by raising doubts in their mind concerning the faithfulness of God, and that both as to the fulfilling of his promises, and the executing his threatenings. He would have us presumptuously apply the promises to ourselves, when we are not in that way of duty in which they are fulfilled to us. Thus he would have tempted our blessed Saviour himself: "If," says he, "thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down; for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee (i)." But our Saviour refutes this sophistry, by answering, "It is written, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God (n)." He likewise tempts men to call in question the truth of God's threatenings. Of this we have a remarkable instance in the attack he made upon our first parents. God had said to them, "In the day that ye eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, ye shall surely die." But the serpent, in direct opposition to this, says, "Ye shall not surely die." He seemed to insinuate, that the threatening was denounced against them, for the purpose

(i) Matt. iv. 6,

(n) Matt. iv. 7.

purpose of alarming alone, without the intention of being executed. Thus, you see how Satan strives, by his temptations, to undermine the very foundations of religion, which is built upon the belief of the being and attributes of God.

2. He tempts also, by counterfeiting the perfections and works of God. Thus, we are told that "the coming of Antichrist is after the working of Satan;" and the meaning of the expression is explained in the following words, "With all power, and signs, and lying wonders, and deceivableness of unrighteousness." Has he not, by this means, kept the heathen world under his dominion for many ages? Nay, so miserably are they deceived by those lying wonders, and pretended oracles, that some of them pay direct homage and adoration to him. And is not the idolatry of the church of Rome supported by the same diabolical artifice? The miracles pretended to be wrought by the relicts of their saints, as they are base impostures, so they are one of the chief engines by which Satan deludes vast numbers in that corrupt church. But, further, the superstition which has existed among all men, Christians as well as heathens, may be fairly ascribed to the devices of the devil. His art consists in, first exciting unwarrantable curiosity, and then directing men to improper means to gratify it. He has his emissaries in the world, who assume to themselves that knowledge of future events which belongs to God alone. To the blinded votaries of such superstition, we may deliver the message which God sent by his prophet to the king of Israel: "Is it not because there is no God in Israel to inquire of his word, that thou hast sent to inquire of Baalzebub the God of Ekron?"

3. He tempts, sometimes, by insolently pretending that he will bestow a more certain reward upon his followers than God does on his. Thus, we find he assaulted our blessed Saviour: "He took him up in--

"to an exceeding high mountain, and showed him
 "all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of
 "them; and said unto him, All these things will I
 "give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship
 "me^(a)."

You may observe how artfully the temptation was laid. Our Saviour, he knew, was to have a kingdom, but not of this world: on the contrary, he was to lead a poor, despised, and sorrowful life among men. Now, says he, if thou wilt abandon thy design of saving mankind with so much pain and difficulty, I will make thee a glorious monarch, and bestow upon thee all this extensive power, this grandeur and greatness. The temptation, indeed, could have no effect upon the holy Jesus; but, alas! how often is it successful on many of his professing followers! How many, for the sake of the mammon of unrighteousness, the riches, honours, and preferments of this world, have parted with their best hopes, and made shipwreck of faith and of a good conscience!

4. Satan sometimes tempts, by representing the sin to which he would persuade us, as small and venial. This seems likewise included in the snare he laid for our first parents: "Ye shall not," says he, "surely die;" as if he had said, "Though God be not so gracious as you imagine, yet surely he will not be so cruel as to punish you with such terrible judgments for a trespass so trivial and unimportant: Fear not, therefore, to touch and taste of this forbidden fruit." Nay, he not only represents the sin to which he would persuade us, as small and venial, but he magnifies the present pleasure and supposed advantage that is to be enjoyed by the practice of it. Why, says he, so nice and scrupulous? By committing this sin, which is but a small one, thou mayst make thyself rich and happy. Thus, by extenuating

(a) Matth. iv. 8, 9.

tenuating the evil of sin, and magnifying the supposed advantage of it, he blinds the sinner's mind, and allures him to the commission of it.

5. At other times, he represents the sin into which he has deceived the sinner, as unpardonable, that by such means he may drive him to despair, and take some unwarrantable course for ending his own life. The devices of Satan are deeper than we can conceive. He first tempted Judas to betray his innocent master; and then, filling his mind with horror and despair, he prevails on him to become his own executioner. Thus, also, he frequently assaults God's own children; and though we have good reason to think that he shall never be so successful as to drive any of them into absolute despair, yet he has been permitted to carry this kind of temptation to an amazing length. When he finds the conscience so tender, that he cannot prevail with it to think lightly of sin, he then plies it with its excessive malignity. He represents the sin which such a person has committed in all its circumstances of aggravation; he even adds to the heinousness of it, till, at last, he makes the poor sinner believe that it is unpardonable. This has been a fiery dart to many real Christians; a temptation which has filled them with great apprehension, and even made them look forward to the termination of their existence as a favour.

6. Satan, at other times, tempts the Christian, by representing to him, that all his labour in religion is in vain, and to no purpose. He has many ways of doing this. Sometimes he represents the difficulties of religion to be so great, and the duties so hard, that it is needless for such weak creatures as we are to attempt them. At other times, he represents God as an austere and tyrannical master, who reaps where he did not sow, and gathers where he did not straw. And, finally, he would make the true Christian believe, that his experiences in religion are but dreams
and

and delusions, the fancies of a distempered brain, or the mere operation of his animal spirits.

Lastly, One of Satan's most dangerous devices for tempting even the children of God, is to awaken in them spiritual pride, on account of their attainments, or the advantages they enjoy above others. By this temptation he produces self-confidence, and emboldens them to venture upon duties and difficult services in their own strength; the consequence of which is, that God withholds his restraining grace, and then they fall into sin. Of this, we have a melancholy instance, in the case of Peter. Our Saviour tells him, That "Satan desired to have him, that he might sift him as wheat (*b*)."¹ And how did he sift him? He filled him with excessive esteem of himself, and of his own strength. Hence, with confident assurance, he exclaims, "Though all men should deny thee, yet will not I." And the event was, that, being justly left to himself, his resolution, however sincere, failed him, and he denied his Saviour thrice.

You see, then, in these few instances, and many others might have been mentioned, how dangerous an adversary Satan is to the souls of men. "We wrestle not," says the apostle in the verse following our text, "against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." Great and formidable names, indeed; which imply, at once, the number, power, and malice of those wicked spirits; and, so united are they in their cursed endeavours to ensnare and destroy our souls, that they are, for the most part, spoken of in scripture as but one person; because, however various their ranks and orders may be, they are all the confederates and subjects of one supreme head and ruler, who is styled Satan, or the Devil, and is expressly said to be the Prince of the devils.

(*b*) Luke xxii. 31.

devils. Beware, therefore, of entertaining slight and superficial thoughts of the power of this enemy; for this conduct has often proved dangerous and fatal, in cases where the enemy was seemingly insignificant and weak. But, at the same time, we are not to be afraid of him; we are not to prove cowards, and turn our back in the hour of danger. No; we are called to resist his machinations, to be stedfast in the faith, and to put on the whole armour of God, that we may be able to withstand in the evil day, in the time of temptation and trial. And this brings me,

II. To explain to you the method of defence and resistance, to which we are directed in the text: "Put on," says the apostle, "the whole armour of God."

The Christian, in his journey towards the heavenly state, is called to contend with the powers of darkness, and exhorted to behave as a good soldier of Jesus Christ; but he is not left naked and unfurnished for the combat. The graces of the Spirit are abundantly sufficient for his defence. And these are here called the armour of God. This, therefore, we must put on. We must not only have grace, the principles of holiness implanted in our souls, but we must have them in lively exercise. It is not enough that a soldier, in time of battle, have his arms ready for service, unless he have them on, and make a proper and vigorous use of them. In like manner, the Christian, who is in a state of continual warfare, must always have his spiritual arms in readiness, and carefully employ them, both for defending himself, and repelling the attacks of his enemies.

The apostle, in the 14th, and some of the verses following, gives a particular description of this armour of God, which we are exhorted to put on.

I. "Stand," says he, "having your loins girt about with truth." Truth or sincerity, is here compared

pared to the soldier's belt or girdle ; because, as the belt strengthens his loins, and gives him vigour in action ; so, truth in the inward parts, a real love to God, and hatred of sin, is the great principle that strengthens the Christian's heart, and animates his resistance. Hypocrites may perhaps withstand some slight temptations, but they will never resist the fiery darts of the wicked one. Let it then be your first and principal concern, to procure and maintain the truth of grace in your hearts, the love of God, and the hatred of all iniquity. This must be the girdle of your loins. It is integrity and uprightness that must preserve you.

2. You must also have on the breast-plate of righteousness, or, as the apostle elsewhere explains it, the breast-plate of faith and love ; by which we are to understand the practice of universal holiness, flowing from faith in God, and love to his righteous law. And this is compared to a breast-plate ; because, as the breast-plate defends the heart and vitals, which are the principal parts of the body, holiness preserves the soul from the wounds that Satan would inflict upon it. If, then, you would be secured against the errors of Satan's temptations, put on the breast-plate of righteousness, by denying all ungodliness and worldly lusts, and living soberly, righteously, and godly, in the present world.

3. You must have your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace. Shoes of brass were anciently part of the military dress, and the use of them was to defend the soldier's feet against the sharp stones or stakes that were privily laid in the way to obstruct his march. The Christian soldier must in like manner be shod ; and he must have for shoes, the preparation of the gospel of peace ; that is, a prepared and resolved frame of mind, to adhere to the gospel, and abide by it in spite of all opposition and danger : for this will enable him to walk with a firm and steady pace in the way of religion. Would you
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then withstand in the evil day, and come off the field with honour : you must not only resolve, as I hope you have done in sincerity, that you will adhere to Christ, and the practice of your duty ; but you must endeavour, through grace, to put these resolutions in practice, and stand on firm ground in the hour of temptation. It is an irresolute wavering temper and conduct, that encourages the attempts of Satan : whereas, a noble stand, and resolute resistance, will soon beat off, or prevent his attacks. " Resist the " devil," says the apostle James, " and he will fly " from you."

4. Above all, take the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. Faith, I mean evangelical faith, is of the greatest use to a Christian in the hour of temptation ; and hence, you see it is recommended to us, in a special manner, as the chief part of the Christian armour. It is compared to the soldier's shield, which he can turn every way, and on every side, to ward off the blows of the enemy. In like manner, the Christian by the lively exercise of faith in the promises of the covenant, and in the power and grace of his Redeemer, which is always ready to be sufficient for him ; can resist the most violent of Satan's temptations, and quench his fiery darts. Above all, therefore, take the shield of faith. Meet every temptation with full confidence in a crucified, but now living and exalted Saviour, with a firm reliance on his all-sufficient grace ; and this will blunt the edge of Satan's fiery darts, so that though they may strike, they shall not have force to hurt you.

5. You must take also the helmet of salvation, that is, hope, which has salvation for its object. It is thus that the apostle explains it. " Put on," says he, " for " an helmet, the hope of salvation." The helmet, you know, defends the head, which is a principal part
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of the body. Thus a solid, well grounded hope of salvation, a hope flowing from union with Christ, and trust in him, will both purify the soul, and keep it from being defiled by the suggestions of Satan. It will likewise encourage the Christian, and animate him to a vigorous resistance. When Satan would tempt to despondency, hope makes us lift up our heads, and patiently wait for the salvation of God. In a word, it is of admirable use, in the whole course of our Christian warfare, to bear up the soul in its conflict with the powers of darkness, and make it hold out to the end. Wait on the Lord, therefore; be of good courage, and he will strengthen your hearts.

6. You must take also the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. The sword, you know, is a very necessary piece of armour, of great use to a soldier in the day of battle, both for attack and defence. And such is the word of God to a Christian. It is called the sword of the Spirit, both because it was inspired by the Holy Spirit, and because he renders it efficacious and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword. By it our blessed Saviour repelled the temptations of Satan. He said, "Thus it is written," and the tempter fled before him. This then is a weapon of proof, which the Captain of our salvation hath tried with success, and by his own example recommends to our use. Acquaint yourselves, then, familiarly with the word of God, and especially let it dwell and rule in your hearts, that you may not only have it ready in the hour of temptation, but learn to use it with skill and address.

Lastly, To all these pieces of the spiritual armour you must add prayer, praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance. Prayer at all times is useful to Christians; but it is of singular advantage in time of temptation. It begets and maintains in the soul a noble magnanimity. It puts it, as it were, in a proper

per posture for defence ; and, through the intercession of Christ, is the means of procuring to it the almighty aids of the Spirit. If then you would stand against the wiles of the devil, and in the evil day, have recourse to God by prayer for his promised assistance. Apply to him as the disciples did, when they thought themselves in danger of sinking, " Lord, save us, or we perish ;" and this, not with the voice of diffidence, not in a cold and formal manner, but with an earnestness and importunity suitable to your danger. In a word, when at any time you are attacked by temptation, lift up your souls to God, for his grace to be sufficient for you, that out of weakness you may be made strong, and wax valiant in fight, and turn to flight the armies of the aliens.

Thus I have endeavoured to shew you the danger to which you are exposed by the temptations of Satan, and in what manner you are to resist and withstand them, viz. by putting on the whole armour of God. " Stand therefore," as good soldiers of Jesus Christ, " having your loins girt about with truth ; " and having on the breast-plate of righteousness, " and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace. Above all, take the shield of faith, " wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery " darts of the wicked one ; and take the helmet of " salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is " the word of God : Praying always with all prayer " and supplication in the spirit, and watching there- " unto with all perseverance."

And know, for your encouragement, that if you thus stand against the wiles of the devil, and hold out to the end of your Christian warfare, God will at last bruise Satan under your feet, and bring you off more than conquerors through Him that loved you : To whom, with the Father, and Holy Spirit, be all praise, honour and glory, now and for ever. Amen.

SERMON XXIV.

ON THE NECESSITY AND MANNER OF DIVINE
INFLUENCE.

Phil. ii. 13.—*For it is God that worketh in you, both to will and to do of his good pleasure.*

THE man who impartially examines the Christian religion, and surveys the many comfortable discoveries which are made in it, cannot but acknowledge that it is perfectly well calculated for accomplishing our recovery and salvation. Here, the glorious method of our deliverance from sin and death, is clearly revealed; here, the way to eternal life is fully displayed; and here, the noblest aids are afforded for enabling us to begin our Christian race, for carrying us through all opposition, and, at last, leading us to the attainment of the glorious prize. It is the last of these discoveries which the apostle mentions in the words of the text: "For it is God that worketh in you, both to will and to do of his good pleasure."

The apostle makes use of these words, as they stand in connection with the preceding verse, as a powerful argument to persuade the Philippians to use their utmost diligence in conquering the difficulties of a religious life, and thus securing their everlasting interests.

rests. "Work out your own salvation," says he, "with fear and trembling; for it is God that worketh in you, both to will and to do of his good pleasure." But we design to consider them as a detached portion of holy writ, containing that encouraging and important doctrine, the agency and assistance of the Holy Spirit afforded to good men under the Christian dispensation. And in them we may observe three things remarkable.

1. The Blessed agent employed in this work. It is God, or the Spirit of God, the third Person of the sacred Trinity, who was sent by Christ to bear the part which he sustains in the scheme of man's redemption, and to pursue the glorious design on which the Saviour came into the world, in applying the benefits of his death and purchase to the souls of his people; for, what God is said to do, in the work of our sanctification, he does by his Holy Spirit.

2. The gracious operation performed by this Blessed agent. He works in his people both to will and to do; that is, he inclines them to that which is good and well-pleasing to God, and enables them to do it. He works in them those holy dispositions, those divine qualities by which they are inwardly renewed and disposed to walk with God; and he affords them all necessary aids for performing the various duties of the Christian and divine life. In a word, by his internal operation and assistance, he begins a good work in the soul, and carries it on to the highest pitch of perfection attainable in this imperfect state.

3. The reason assigned, why God thus works in his people to will and to do. It is of his own good pleasure; not for the sake of any previous worth or goodness in them. No; this can never entitle them to any share in the influences of the Spirit, which are entirely a supernatural gift, unmerited by them, and a provision of sovereign grace for helpless sinners. But this is owing to His infinite mercy and free grace,

for the sake of the precious blood of Christ, who was a Lamb without blemish and without spot. The words being thus shortly explained, the argument contained in them seems to be this.

That God, of his free and sovereign grace, is, by his Holy Spirit, the sole agent who inclines us to that which is good, and enables us to perform it.

In discoursing from this observation, we propose, by Divine assistance, *First*, To establish the truth of the doctrine, or show you the absolute necessity of divine influence, in order to the production of any good thing in the soul. We shall, *Secondly*, Endeavour to give some account of the Spirit's operation, or show in what manner He works in true Christians, to will and to do. We shall, *Thirdly*, Offer some reflections for illustrating the reason in the text, "Of his own good pleasure." And, *Lastly*, Conclude with a few inferences.

I. We propose, *first*, to establish the truth of the doctrine, or show you the absolute necessity of Divine influence, in order to the production of any good thing in the soul. Now this will appear if we consider,

1. The weakness and degeneracy of human nature. To this degeneracy scripture gives ample testimony: and indeed, to be convinced of it, we need only turn our attention to what passes in our minds, and consider the motions of our own hearts, or look abroad through the world, and observe the conduct of mankind. Have we not all of us experienced from our earliest years, from the very first openings of reason, a violent aversion to every thing spiritually good, and a propensity equally violent to what conscience itself informs us is wrong? Have we not daily proofs of this corruption, from the impiety and wickedness which prevail around us? Our understandings are full of darkness; we know not the road to happiness, nor can we find it

it out without some superior guide. And if at any time we come to the knowledge of our duty, by reason, or by revelation, yet how strangely are our hearts perverted! We are not only disaffected to God and goodness, but strongly biassed to folly and vice. What an affecting sense had the apostle Paul of this! "I find," says he, "a law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin (a):" Which made him utter that lively and pathetic complaint, in the following verse; "O, wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" But if, in addition to this natural inability, we have wilfully contracted vicious habits, if we have brought ourselves under the tyranny of those imperious masters, and are led captive by them at their pleasure; we are effectually in subjection and fetters, enslaved to our lusts, and sold under sin: like the centurion's servant in the gospel, when they say, Go, we must go; when they say, Come, we must come; when they say, Do this, we must obey and do it. Now, can we possibly imagine, that, in those unhappy circumstances, we can deliver ourselves from the bondage of corruption, and restore our souls to a state of light and liberty? Can we, by the feeble remains of our natural powers, change our own hearts, subdue our lusts and passions, and make ourselves new creatures? Surely no: it is as impossible for men in this deplorable situation to perform any thing spiritually good, as it is to restore youth to age, or give life to the dead: for, in the strong language of the prophet, the Ethiopian cannot change his skin, nor the leopard his spots.

2. The necessity of Divine influence, in order to the production of true religion in the soul, will farther appear, if we consider the greatness and excellency of the work itself.

It is a work indeed every way worthy of God, a glorious effect of his Divine power and grace, which

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(a) Rom. vii. 23.

none but God himself can accomplish. To form religion in the heart, is to raise a dead sinner to life, to make light arise in the midst of darkness, and to reduce the greatest confusion to harmony and order: and what can be sufficient for this, but the finger of God? God alone is the author of nature; he at first commanded the light to shine out of darkness, and formed every part of this visible world. His goodness and mercy are the source and fountain of every blessing. All the faculties of our minds, and every improvement we make in knowledge and wisdom, are solely derived from him. Now, is his influence necessary in these less important matters, and do we not much more depend upon him for things of greater consequence? Is all that knowledge we have acquired in the concerns of this life, to be ascribed to his teaching and influence; and ought not the enlightening of our darkened minds, and inspiring us with heavenly wisdom, much more be ascribed to him? Did it require Almighty power to create a world; nay, to produce the meanest insect on the face of the earth? And must it not require an equal degree of power to transform the human mind, and to quicken it when dead in trespasses and sins? No less power than that which is Divine, can produce this effect: none can bring a clean thing out of an unclean, but God himself; his grace alone can turn men from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God.

3. This will still farther appear, if we consider what powerful opposition is raised against this work, by our spiritual enemies. No sooner does the soul begin to be awakened, than it is attacked by a host of adversaries. Satan, the prince of darkness, whose power is still very great, exerts himself with the utmost vigour, to prevent the salvation of sinners. He is a malicious and an active enemy; who employs every art, and watches every opportunity, to render us, like himself, completely wicked. A present degenerate

generate world around us, is another source of the keenest opposition. Its glittering pleasures are apt to ensnare the mind, and to draw off the affections to the pursuit of vanity; while, on the other hand, religion is the object of scorn and contempt; it is reviled by some, insulted by others, and too frequently betrayed in the house of its friends. But, besides all these, there is a treacherous party within, even the lusts of our own hearts, concerning which, it may justly be said, that a man's enemies are those of his own household; these are our worst and most dangerous enemies, which ly in our bosom, and betray us into misery and ruin. So that we are not only weak and helpless in ourselves, but we are strongly assaulted by powerful enemies; we wrestle not with flesh and blood, but with principalities and powers, with the rulers of the darkness of this world, with spiritual wickednesses in high places. Now, to produce religion in the soul, in the midst of such violent opposition, must evidently require a divine agency. And surely the Christian, when thus recovered by the grace of God, has reason to say with Israel of old, "If it had not been the Lord who was on our side, when our enemies rose up against us, then they had swallowed us up quick; the waters had overwhelmed us, the stream had gone over our soul."

Thus, then, it plainly appears, that Divine grace is absolutely necessary in order to our conversion, and progress in holiness. But, to put this matter beyond all question, let us,

4. Attend to the many express declarations in scripture, and we will find, that this gracious change in the soul, and every degree of sanctification, is constantly ascribed to the Holy Spirit. To this effect is that general declaration of the apostle James; "Every good and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights (a):"

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(a) James i. 17.

not only every temporal blessing, but likewise every pious disposition, every motion in the divine life. God himself expressly promises to give the first principles of religious obedience by means of the Holy Spirit. "A new heart," says he, "will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes; and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them (b)." Agreeable to which, this gracious change, when it is accomplished, is expressly ascribed to the Holy Spirit: "Not by works of righteousness," says Paul, "which we have done, but according to his mercy, he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost, which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour (c)." In a word, there is nothing more plainly taught in the sacred writings, than the necessity of Divine influence, in order to the rise and progress of religion in the soul. Attend only to that solemn declaration of our blessed Lord; "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a man be born of water, and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God (e)." And, in another place, "No man," says he, "can come unto me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him (b)." From these observations it is evident, that, if we attend to the language of scripture, and in our hearts believe the word of God, we must acknowledge that the Holy Spirit is the sole agent who works in true Christians both to will and to do.—We proposed,

II. To give some account of the Spirit's operation, or, endeavour to shew in what manner he works in Christians to will and to do.

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(b) Ezek. xxxvi. 26, 27.

(c) Tit. iii. 5, 6.

(e) John iii. 5.

(b) John, vi. 44.

1. The manner of the Spirit's operation is secret and mysterious. It is difficult, if not impossible, fully to explain it. We cannot in many cases distinguish between the motions of the Spirit, and those of our own minds, between the immediate suggestions of the Holy Ghost, and the dictates of our own reason. For this reason, our Saviour uses a figure of speech expressive of indeterminate and incomprehensible operation: "The wind," says he, "bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit." But we must not therefore deny the reality of this operation. We must not deny that God acts powerfully upon the mind, because we are unable fully to comprehend the manner of his operation. Are there not many things in the world which we know to be certain facts, and which no man in his senses will pretend to dispute, of which however we cannot give any tolerable account? Are we not all of us sensible that our souls are united to our bodies? Do we not feel the mutual influence which they have on each other? and yet, Which of us can pretend to say in what this union consists? We are assured, both from reason and revelation, that God works through all in the natural world, that his presence supports and animates the whole creation; and yet we are strangers to the manner of his agency; or, in the language of Solomon, "As we know not the way of the Spirit, nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child; even so we know not the works of God who maketh all."

2. The manner of this operation, is likewise various and different. God is not confined to one uniform method in dispensing his grace; he is an infinitely wise and free agent, who has perfect knowledge of the heart of man, and divides to every one severally as he wills. Many indeed, and various, are the means he is pleased to employ. Sometimes he awakens the conscience with awful convictions of guilt; sometimes

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he melts the heart with the deepest anguish and sorrow ; sometimes, again, he captivates the affections with delightful views of the love of God ; and at other times, he carries on this work in such a silent and insensible manner, that it may be almost impossible to say when it was begun, or how carried on. But whatever method he is pleased to employ, the effect is invariably the same: an unfeigned love to God, a cordial trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, and a sincere affection to our brethren, are the genuine fruits of the Holy Spirit, in whatever manner they may be produced by him.

3. The manner of the Spirit's operation, is always perfectly suitable to the operations of our own minds. It is a most dangerous mistake in religion, to think, that the Spirit of God offers violence to the will ; for this would be to destroy that liberty, which is the distinguishing glory of our nature, and renders us accountable for all our actions. No ; whatever some may have falsely insinuated, nothing is more rational, nothing more consistent with the liberty of man, than the operation of the Holy Spirit. This Blessed Agent acts really and powerfully upon the mind, but he uses no force or compulsion ; his influence is always consistent with the operations of our faculties, inso-much that it is often difficult to distinguish it from the rational exercise of our own thoughts ; nor could we of ourselves discover the source from which they proceeded, if we were not assured by Divine revelation, that the Holy Spirit is the author of them.

4. He enlightens the darkened mind, and makes it see the things of religion in their reality and importance. Formerly the mind was involved in thick darkness, being, as the apostle emphatically expresses it, " alienated from the life of God, through the ignorance that was in it, because of the blindness of the heart." But now, God says, Let there be light ; and immediately the clouds are dispersed, the day begins to dawn, and the day-star to arise ; then the mind is fixed in attention, its powers are awakened,
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and the man is brought to serious reflection. Things now appear to him in a different light from what they did before ; he sees the native deformity of sin, and is fully convinced of its fearful consequences. Once he entertained a fond opinion of his own merit and abilities ; he imagined himself rich and increased in goods, and standing in need of nothing ; but now he discerns the lurking corruption of his heart, that he is poor, and miserable, and wretched, and naked, and blind. In a word, he has juster ideas of God, of Christ, and of the method of salvation which the gospel displays.

5. The Holy Spirit influences the mind to give a lively and steady assent to the truths of religion. These truths seem no longer to be vain conceits, but things of which the mind is firmly persuaded. It has obtained the knowledge of them by divine illumination, and they appear to it real and substantial, and worthy of its principal attention. Formerly, the sinner could not perhaps but assent to the evil of sin, and the vanity of the world, in his hours of retirement and serious reflection ; but this assent was then wavering and inconstant, like the morning cloud, and the early dew which passeth away : whereas now, his conscience is deeply impressed with a permanent and lively sense of sin ; he feels its bitterness, and nothing can satisfy his mind, but pardon and forgiveness. Formerly, he esteemed himself for his own fancied excellencies, and presumptuously despised the method of salvation presented to him in the gospel ; but now, his mind being come to the knowledge of itself, he values a Saviour above every thing else ; or, in the language of the holy apostle, " what things were gain to him, now he counteth loss for Christ ; " yea, doubtless, he counteth all things but loss for " the excellency of the knowledge of his Lord and Saviour."

6. The Holy Spirit likewise sets the mind at liberty from the prevailing influence of lust and vicious inclinations. Evil passions formerly reigned in the heart; the will was disaffected to God and religion, while it was strongly attached to sin. Hence, reason had not its proper influence; the best instructions were altogether ineffectual; and the motions of the Spirit were stifled in the soul. This deplorable state is emphatically represented in scripture, under the image of a stony heart, and a carnal mind. "The carnal mind," says the apostle, "is enmity against God; it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." But now, Almighty grace interposing, this enmity of the heart is subdued, and the will disarmed of its prejudice and opposition. Thus the mountains melt like wax at the presence of the Lord, who turns the hard rock into a standing water, and the flinty rock into a springing well.

7. God, by his powerful renewing grace, gives a new direction to the will, and renders it obedient to the will of God. Having thus delivered the soul from the bondage of corruption, he restores it to the glorious liberty of the children of God; he excites in the mind those holy dispositions, and implants those divine qualities by which it is inwardly renewed and disposed to walk with God. This is expressed in scripture, by giving men a new heart, and putting a new spirit within them; the accomplishment of which, God claims as his own prerogative. Formerly, the Spirit met with the keenest opposition in the soul; all his strivings with it were ineffectual, and the sinner remained inflexibly wicked. But now, a mighty arm is revealed, the sceptre of his kingdom, and rod of his strength. All obstructions are removed; every high imagination is brought down; and sinners are made a willing people in the day of his power.

But further, God not only works in his people to will, but likewise to do, by affording them all necessary

sary assistance for performing the various duties of the Christian life.

Having begun the good work in the soul, he does not accomplish it all at once, but carries it on by a gradual progress. The Spirit not only implants the seed of grace in the heart, but he waters it by his special influence, and makes it grow up to a ripeness for glory. Having lighted the divine flame in the soul, he does not leave it to faint and die away, but is continually dispensing new supplies for its nourishment and strength. He excites such gracious dispositions as he has implanted in the heart; he communicates light and assistance suitable to the various wants of the Christian, and thus enables him to improve in virtue, to resist the strongest temptations; while he at the same time enlivens every period of his life with joy and comfort. In a word, this Blessed Spirit resides in the pious soul, and leads it on from strength to strength, till at last it appear before God in Zion.

We proposed,

III. To offer some reflections for illustrating the reason in the text, "Of his own good pleasure."

1. God is under no constraint or necessity to concern himself for our happiness. He is infinitely great and glorious, independently happy in himself, and therefore can have no inducement, from fear or advantage, to entertain any affection for the sons of men. Justly indeed may we adopt the language of Eliphaz, "Can a man be profitable unto God, as he that is wise may be profitable to himself? Is it any pleasure to the Almighty, that we are righteous, or is it any gain to him, that we make our ways perfect (a)?" Our righteousness may indeed profit men like ourselves, but our goodness cannot extend to God, whose happiness is unalterably secured in the enjoyment of his own perfections.

2. As God is under no obligation on his own part, to work in us any thing spiritually good; so neither

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(a) Job. xxii. 2, 3.

is there any worth or merit on ours, to incline him to do it. We are at best but his creatures, the work of his hands. The highest homage and worship we can give is unquestionably due to God. When therefore we have done all we can, we have done nothing but our duty, and are but unprofitable servants. Where is boasting then? Where is merit? No flesh must glory in the presence of God, for he alone makes us to differ. Now if we have received it, shall we glory as if we had not received it? But, farther, if we take a view of human nature in its present fallen and corrupted state, if we consider how lame and imperfect our purest services are, so far from imagining we merit any thing at the hand of God, must we not acknowledge that we stand in need of pardon, and humbly resolve to lay our hand upon our mouth, ascribing every good thing either in us, or done by us, to the sovereign and free grace of God, who will have mercy on whom he will have mercy?

We shall now conclude with a few reflections.

1. Is the agency of the Holy Spirit so absolutely necessary, in order to our conversion and progress in religion? how deeply impressed should we be with the conviction of our own weakness and insufficiency! Without the aids of divine grace, we can do nothing. Whatever profession we may make, whatever moral duties we may practise, if we are destitute of the spirit, all is but solemn show, a mere empty form, which can neither be acceptable to God, nor profitable to ourselves. Let us not then rest any longer in a course of dead and lifeless obedience; but, sensible of our own inability to do any thing pleasing to God, let us earnestly implore the gift of the Holy Spirit, as the Great Author of regeneration, and every degree of increasing holiness.

2. Does the Holy Spirit begin and carry on the good work within us? Let us cheerfully resign ourselves

to

to his influence and direction. Let us be deeply persuaded, that his gracious operations on the mind, are not only real, but of the highest importance, and not give place to unbelieving thoughts, or profane insinuations, as if they were the fancies of a warm distempered brain, or the delusions of Satan. But, under a steady conviction of his ability and readiness to help us; let us firmly depend on his grace in the performance of every duty, and in opposition to every sin. Let us be deeply humbled and grieved, when at any time we have grieved the Spirit of God, and treated Him unworthily. And under his powerful influences, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, and perfect holiness in the fear of God.

3. Is it owing to the sovereign and free grace of God, that he works in any to will and to do? Let such as are inwardly sanctified by the Spirit, acknowledge their obligations to God, and ascribe to Him the praise. It is owing to Him, that you are not left to perish with the workers of iniquity; but singled out from the rest of mankind, as the objects of his distinguishing love. Adore divine grace, therefore, that has made you to differ, and snatched you as brands pluckt out of the burning; and let the overflowings of a thankful heart break forth in the language of David, "I will praise thee, O Lord my God, with
" all my heart, and I will glorify thy name for ever-
" more; for great is thy mercy towards me; thou
" hast redeemed my soul from the lowest hell."

SERMON XXV.

THE NATURE AND OBLIGATIONS OF RELIGIOUS CONCERN.

Acts ix. 6. And he, trembling and astonished, said, Lord, What wilt thou have me to do?

THESE are the words of Saul, that famous convert to the Christian faith. He had formerly been engaged in persecuting the followers of Jesus, with the most unrelenting fury; and so zealous was he in the prosecution of this undertaking, that he seems not only to have laid aside that gentleness of manners, which might have been expected from one of his education, but even that pity for persons in distress, which is so natural to the heart of man. Thus, in various places of the Acts, and particularly in the preceding context, we find him threatening vengeance and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, without the least regard to innocence of life, or tenderness of age: And now he had obtained a commission from the chief priest, to go as far as Damascus, in quest of the Christians, and to bring such of them as he found there, bound to Jerusalem.

But,

But, let us adore the riches, and the sovereignty of Divine grace. In his way thither, Jesus, the injured Redeemer, appears, and diffuses round him a brightness exceeding that of the sun; on perceiving which, Saul fell prostrate to the ground, and heard a voice from heaven calling to him, "Saul, Saul, Why persecutest thou me?" The furious persecutor is now, indeed, melted and subdued; he who, but a little before, waged an impious war against the followers of Jesus, is now laid at the foot of the cross, and might justly have been singled out as a monument of vengeance. But God, who has compassion on the ignorant, designed him as a vessel of mercy, as a glorious instrument in preaching that faith, which he once endeavoured to destroy. This day of his astonishment, was in the noblest sense the day of his birth; for now, in the midst of his cruelty, he is awakened and convinced; and, prostrating himself before that Jesus whom he persecuted, submissively exclaims in the words of the text,—“ Lord, What wilt thou have me to do?”

“ And he, trembling and astonished, said, Lord, “ Lord, What wilt thou have me to do?” Words which express, in the most lively manner, that concern and uneasiness which Saul had now upon his mind,—a concern, not for the obtaining of wealth and honour, or any of those trifling pleasures, which the men of the world pursue with such assiduity and ardour, but for his precious and immortal soul; an earnest care and sollicitude, how to be delivered from that guilt, and to escape that danger which he had incurred.

From the temper and present circumstances of the awakened apostle, we shall take occasion, through Divine assistance, *First*, To explain that concern for the salvation of the soul, which is here exemplified in the conduct of Saul: *Secondly*, Show you the sources from which it springs: *Thirdly*, We shall endeavour

endeavour to awaken you to some such serious concern, by a few arguments addressed to your consideration: And, *Fourthly*, Conclude with a few directions to such as are in some measure awakened, and made to cry out with the apostle in the text, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?"—We propose,

I. To explain that concern for the salvation of the soul, which is here exemplified in the conduct of Saul.

1. It implies in it, a deep and affecting sense of guilt. By the salvation of the soul, we mean, deliverance from the wrath to come, from eternal death and destruction. Now, wherever a real concern for this prevails, there must necessarily be an inward sense or conviction of our being liable to it; for it is absolutely impossible, that we can ever desire to be delivered from any evil or danger, till we think ourselves exposed to it. But the wrath to come, everlasting misery and destruction, is an evil to which all of us have become subject. Whatever our condition may be in other respects, however great and distinguished among men, yet we are guilty and rebellious; we have broken the laws of our Creator, and rendered ourselves obnoxious to eternal death. Now, the sinner who is really awakened, not only assents to this as a matter unquestionably true, but his heart is deeply affected with it. He not only believes himself guilty and polluted, odious to perfect purity, and liable every moment to avenging justice; but he has an humbling and inward conviction of it, which fills him with the deepest sorrow and remorse. Of this, we have a very striking instance in the penitent Psalmist. "Thine arrows," says he, "stick fast in me, and thy hand presseth me sore. There is no soundness in my flesh because of thine anger; neither is there any rest in my bones because of my sin: for mine iniquities are gone over my head; as a heavy burthen, they are too heavy for me." In this

this manner, the awakened sinner will naturally express his concern. He is ashamed, and blushes to lift up his face to God, because of his iniquities. Like the publican, who stood afar off, and durst not so much as lift up his eyes to heaven, full of inward concern he smites upon his breast. In a word, the soul in this condition, is covered with darkness as with a cloud; but when that cloud is removed, it often happens, that they are enlightened by the Sun of righteousness and made glad according to the days in which they have seen evil.

2. This concern for the salvation of the soul, implies in it likewise an alarming apprehension of danger. This is the natural result of the former. Wherever an affecting sense of guilt prevails, it is always attended with a dread of punishment. They are inseparably connected in nature. Else, Why that secret shame, that fear and horror which seize upon the wicked? When we are conscious to ourselves of having acted wrong, Why do we feel our minds disturbed by remorse? This is nothing but the voice of nature proclaiming within us, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die."

It is true, indeed, while sinners enjoy prosperity and health, while the candle of the Lord shines upon them, and their glory and wealth is increased, they may pretend to shake off those fears, and affect to be superior to the dread of future punishment. But this is, like Jonah, to sleep in a storm; or as an apostle emphatically expresses it, "to sport themselves with their own deceivings." The awakened sinner acts a wiser part. Instead of attempting to divert those fears, or silence the reproaches of his wounded conscience, he hears them with concern, and seriously thinks on his misery and danger. As he is sensible that he has offended God, he dreads the effects of his righteous indignation. His apprehensions of this kind are even sometimes so alarming, that under the deepest

deepest distress and anguish of mind, he is ready to adopt the language of Job; "Oh, that my grief were thoroughly weighed, and my calamity laid in the balances together! For the arrows of the Almighty are within me, the poison whereof drinketh up my spirits: the terrors of God do set themselves in array against me." And what can be more dreadful, than to be exposed to the wrath of the Almighty, who can punish to the utmost, and who lives for ever to execute his vengeance? How vigorously then should we endeavour to be delivered from this wrath, and reconciled to God! And this leads me to observe,

3. That this concern for the salvation of the soul, implies in it likewise, an earnest care and anxiety of mind to be delivered from this guilt, and to escape this danger. This we find was the case with Saul in our text. No sooner was his conscience wounded, than he immediately cries out, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" And this indeed is the voice of nature itself. There is a principle of self-preservation implanted within us, which inspires us with a natural apprehension of every thing that can destroy our being, or endanger our happiness. No sooner, therefore, is any thing presented to us as an object of terror, than fear, that wakeful passion takes the alarm, and excites us to fly from it. But when the object we dread is infinitely terrible, when inflexible justice, armed with almighty power, is incensed against us, our fears in a special manner are excessive, and our inquiries for deliverance natural. The sinner, awakened by a sense of danger, seeing himself guilty and polluted, is filled with anxious concern; and the language of his heart is, "What shall I do to be saved?" To this purpose, we have a lively instance in the behaviour of Peter's hearers. The apostle had dealt faithfully with them; he had charged them with the sin of crucifying the Lord of Glory; and the consequence

sequence was, their consciences were stung with remorse; and "they said unto Peter and the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do (a)?" Their minds were now awakened with a sense of guilt, they found themselves exposed to the wrath of God, and hence they were filled with anxiety how to be delivered from it.

II. We now proceed to inquire, whence this concern for the salvation of the soul arises.

And here, to prevent mistakes, it may be proper to observe, that, in order to produce this concern, the influence of the Holy Spirit is absolutely necessary. This will be evident to any one who seriously considers the weakness and corruption of human nature, the greatness and excellency of this good work, the violent opposition raised against it by our spiritual enemies, and the express declarations of holy scripture. And, indeed, to deny this, or even to call it in question, would betray the grossest ignorance both of ourselves, and of the word of God. "Without me," says our Saviour, "ye can do nothing:" and the apostle tells us, that we are not sufficient of ourselves to think so much as one good thought; and, by a necessary consequence, we are quite unable, without superior assistance, to perform one good action. The Spirit of God is the first mover, and not only so, but the sole agent in this good work. He it is who commands the light to shine out of darkness; he convinces men of sin, of righteousness and judgment; it is his inward and powerful operation, that makes the sinner cry out, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?"

Now, taking this along with us, it will appear that this concern for the salvation of the soul, arises from the two following causes.

1. From a discovery made to the soul by the Holy Spirit, of the hateful and malignant qualities of sin; that it is the vilest, most absurd, and unreasonable thing

(a) Acts ii. 37.

thing in the world; that it deforms human nature, pollutes and debases the soul, and sinks a man far below the dignity of his being; that it is the greatest reproach to our reason, and contradicts the very purpose of our existence. Again, the sinner awakened by the Spirit of God, sees sin in general, and his own sins in particular, to be the highest dishonour to God, a contempt of his authority, a violation of his laws, and directly opposite to all the perfections of his nature. He even discovers that every act of sin of which he is guilty, is impregnated with nothing less than rebellion against the Divine Majesty, opposition to his holiness, ingratitude to his goodness, and defiance of his almighty power. And, by how much every sin is aggravated by circumstances of time and place, by being committed against the clearest light, contrary to the remonstrances of our own consciences, the stirrings of the Spirit within us, and solemn engagements; so much the more is sin composed of these malignant qualities. Now, when the sinner has such views of sin as these, when he sees this monster as it were dissected, and discovers the hateful ingredients in its composition, he cannot but detest and abhor it; he is made to blush and be ashamed of himself before God, and, full of grief and concern, to cry out with the apostle, "O, wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"

2. This concern more especially arises, when the Holy Spirit discovers to the sinner, the fatal and direful consequences to which his sins expose him, both in time and through eternity; that they have made him a child of wrath, and a son of perdition; that he is thereby fallen under the displeasure of God, and liable every moment to the dreadful curses of his broken law; that ruin and destruction hang over him, and threaten him with intolerable, and everlasting misery. These consequences of sin may for a little be suspended by the interposition of mercy, in order

to try, if, during this period of respite, the sinner will be so wise as to return to God. But, if it shall fail of producing this effect, mercy foregoes the friendly office, and vengeance overtakes him. For as Paul informs us, "the wages of sin are death (a)." "Indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish shall be upon every soul that doth evil." And who knows the power of God's anger, and what Almighty justice can inflict upon the wicked? Surely it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. Our God is a consuming fire; and who can dwell with devouring fire? who can abide with everlasting burnings? Now, when the soul is awakened to such a sense of sin, when it is impressed with such ideas of its malignity and unhappy consequences, it is then, indeed, made to complain of it as a heavy burden, from which above all things it desires to be delivered.

III. We now proceed to endeavour to excite you to some such serious concern, by a few arguments addressed to your consideration.

I might address you by a great variety of motives, for almost every thing around us affords an argument to sober contemplation. In the words of the prophet Isaiah, we might call upon you as men, as reasonable and intelligent creatures, "Remember, and show yourselves men: bring it again to mind, O ye transgressors." We might apply to you by the most engaging motives of the gospel, by the tender mercies of God, the dying love of a Redeemer, and those exceeding great and precious promises, in comparison of which the pleasures of the world are contemptible and mean. But, as this would lead us far beyond the limits of an ordinary discourse, we shall confine ourselves to the few following arguments.

1. Consider the unspeakable dignity and worth of the immortal soul. View it in its noble faculties, those intellectual and active powers with which it is endowed,

(a) Rom. vi. 23.

endowed. It can survey the whole creation, ascend above it, and contemplate its glorious Author. How alert and vigorous is its will and fancy! and how Divine are all its affections, when sanctified by the Holy Spirit, and directed to their proper objects! Consider what an inestimable price was paid for its redemption, a price no less than the precious blood of the Son of God. And must not that be of infinite value, which God has furnished with such noble faculties? so that, in the language of the Psalmist, he has made it but a little lower than the angels, and crowned it with glory and honour; and for the sake of which his eternal Son died upon the cross, that it might be recovered from misery and guilt? Is then the soul a being of such dignity and value, and shall we be unconcerned about it. If a treasure were committed to our care, for which, in case of losing it, we should be accountable, how anxious would we be to preserve it from danger! Thy soul, O man, is a treasure of infinitely greater value than the whole world; it is committed to thy care; and if it is lost, thou art lost for ever. With what anxiety then ought we to guard over the interests and the happiness of our immortal spirits!

2. Consider that as the soul is a being of such dignity and worth, its salvation must infinitely concern us. In proportion to the native dignity and value of any being, its happiness is of greater or less importance. Creatures of a lower rank, and more confined desires, are neither capable nor designed for such high enjoyments, as those of nobler natures and of more enlarged faculties. Now, since it evidently appears that the soul is a being so divine in its original, and so excellent in its powers, its happiness must be of great, nay, of infinite moment. But this, alas, however certain, is one of those many interesting truths, which make little or no impression on mankind. How few are there who have that inward sense, and serious conviction of it, which its importance demands?

Nay,

Nay, if we may judge by their conduct, the bulk of men around us have never bestowed on it a serious thought. Amazing indifference! Is it a matter of no consequence whether we be saved or not? Are happiness and misery such trifling subjects, that they are not worth the reflection of an hour? Be not deceived. Salvation is a thing which claims the most serious attention. It is no less than a deliverance from the wrath of God, and being put in possession of that happiness which is large as the wishes, and lasting as the days of an immortal spirit. And is not this a matter worthy of our highest concern? We employ thought and care about the things of the present life; how to amass riches, or gratify desire: and ought not we much rather to employ them on objects of a more exalted nature, on objects that respect the salvation of our souls, and everlasting bliss? How then shall we answer it to God, and to our own consciences, if, while we are careful and cumbered about many things, we neglect the one thing needful; if, while we are solicitous what we shall eat, what we shall drink, and wherewithal we shall be clothed, it is seldom or never the question with us, What shall we do to be saved? We shall conclude this argument, by recommending to your serious attention, that wise and weighty admonition of our Lord, "What is a man profited, though he should gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul (a)?"

3. Consider, that while we continue unconcerned and thoughtless, we expose ourselves to the most threatening danger. It is a certain fact, and the least reflection may be sufficient to convince us, that we have broken the laws of our Creator, trampled on his sacred authority, and thus justly incurred his wrath and displeasure. This is what the sacred writers expressly assert in a variety of passages; and indeed, to be convinced

† 2 E

(a) Math. xvi. 26.

vinced of it, we need only look into our own hearts, or take a slight review of our past lives. Have we not all, from our earliest years, from the very first openings of reason, a violent aversion to every thing spiritually good, and as strong a propensity to folly and vice? Have we not indulged this sinful bias in innumerable instances? Have we not omitted those duties which God expressly requires, and committed those sins which he as plainly forbids? And must not such a conduct be displeasing to him? Yes; as sure as there is a God he is offended at us, his justice is incensed against us, and every moment we are exposed to his wrath: and can we, in such a condition, be happy and secure? Do you know, or have you ever considered what this wrath means? If it was only the wrath of a man like yourselves, though of the most formidable prince on the face of the earth, comparatively speaking, it would claim but little notice; for they, at most, can only kill the body, but are not able to hurt the soul: But it is the wrath of an infinite God, whose power is almighty, and whose justice is inflexible. It is the fury and fierceness of his wrath to which you are exposed; and how dreadful must that be? Into what an inconceivable depth of misery must they who suffer it be plunged? For who knows the power of God's anger, and what a fearful thing it is to fall into His hands? What meanest thou, then, thoughtless and secure sinner? Awake, and fly, by sincere repentance, from the wrath to come, before it overtake you, and there be no escaping.

Lastly, Consider, that however secure and insensible we may be at present, the time will at last come, when conscience will awake and bring our ways to remembrance.

While we enjoy prosperity and health; while we are engaged in the business, and surrounded with the gaieties of life; we may indeed contrive to fly from serious

serious thought, and imagine sickness and death at a distance. But what is this but self-delusion? The young and the healthy are as liable to diseases and death, as the aged and infirm; nay, how do we know but we may die to-morrow, or that this very night our souls may be required of us? For what is our life? It is but a vapour that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. Ye careless and unconcerned sinners, who prodigally throw away your precious time, and, as it were, dance upon the brink of destruction: Do you consider that you must soon die; and that, for any thing you know, some fatal disease may this day begin its attack? And if once you were laid upon the bed of affliction, and see the approach of the inexorable tyrant; conscience will probably awake and bring you to reflection. Thus, we find that the prodigal son came to himself when he was reduced to the last extremity, and ready to perish with hunger. Death has something in it that fills the mind with awe. But if it has no effect of that kind upon sinners; if, as it is to be feared, is too often the case, they die as they have lived, thoughtless and unconcerned; How miserable beyond imagination will they be? In the other world, they shall endeavour to silence their awakened consciences in vain; and, however much, against their inclination, shall be forced to reflect with horror, on the carelessness and guilt, by which they were undone. To this purpose, when God speaks, by the prophet Jeremiah, of the extravagant folly of thoughtless sinners; he adds, in a very awful manner, "In the latter day ye shall consider it perfectly (Jer. xlii. 18). But, alas! it will then be too late; for beyond the grave consideration can only aggravate their misery, and increase their remorse. How much wiser then would it be to consider, while yet consideration may prevent our ruin! With what seriousness ought we to apply our minds

minds to the concerns of our souls, and lay to heart the things that belong to our eternal peace, before they be hid from our eyes ?

And now, need I use any additional arguments to persuade you to serious consideration ? If those I have mentioned have no effect upon you ; if you are still insensible of the worth of your precious souls ; if you hold salvation and eternal happiness in no estimation, and at the same time be content to dwell with devouring fire and everlasting burnings : If these motives prevail not with you, what other can ? O that the Spirit of God, whose prerogative it is to awaken the conscience, would carry them home with power upon your hearts, and effectually engage you to compliance with your duty !

IV. We shall now conclude with a few advices to such as are in some measure awakened, and made to cry out with the apostle in the text, " Lord, What wilt thou have me to do ? "

Is there then in this assembly any awakened and convinced sinner ; any who, apprised of his folly, and sensible of his misery, is desirous to fall at the foot of the Redeemer's cross, and sincerely resolved to give unlimited obedience to him for the future ? To such, I shall now briefly address myself.

1. Entertain and cherish your present convictions ; for these are happy influences of the Spirit, which, if duly attended to, may be improved to the eternal advantage of your souls. Beware therefore of neglecting them ; of putting them off to another season ; or endeavouring to get rid of them, by flying to the business or amusements of life. Remember that by doing so, you run the greatest danger. The stifling of conviction grieves the Spirit of God ; has a fatal tendency to harden the conscience ; and may justly provoke him to strive no longer with you. If, therefore, you have any wish to be saved, cherish such serious impressions

impressions as you may now be under, and labour to fix them in your minds.

2. Abstain from every thing by which these impressions may be weakened or effaced.

If you are really awakened, sin will appear to be the disease and ruin of your souls; and therefore, if ever you hope for recovery, you must immediately and resolutely depart from it; nor must you give up this or that particular vice, with which perhaps you will not find it very difficult to part; but every sin without exception. In a word, if you would have the Spirit of grace to carry on a good work in your souls, you must give no encouragement to any sinful inclination; and particularly, guard against deliberate and presumptuous sins; for these are plain obstructions to his gracious influences, and eminently provoke him to withdraw.

3. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved. This is the advice which the apostles gave to the awakened jailor, when he solicitously inquired what he must do to be saved: And, indeed, it is an advice of the highest importance to every convinced and humbled sinner. You are guilty, diseased, and helpless. To whom then should you apply for relief, but to the Great Redeemer and Sovereign Physician, who is able to save you to the uttermost; and expressly declares, that if you come to him he will in no wise cast you out? Be persuaded, therefore, whoever you are, though perhaps the chief of sinners, immediately to fly to Christ as your only refuge; and to lay hold of his perfect righteousness as the foundation of your hopes. And know, for your encouragement, that if you thus accept of him, and subject yourselves to his government, you have the highest assurance possible, that you shall not perish, but have everlasting life. "For this is the will of Him that sent me," says our Saviour himself, "that every one that seeth the Son, and believeth on Him, may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day."

Lastly, Lay it down as a most certain principle, that no attempt in religion is to be made in your own strength. If you know your own hearts, you must be sensible of this. For whether we consider the frailty and degeneracy of our nature, the power of evil habits, the inconstancy of our best resolutions, or the malice and activity of our spiritual enemies, nothing is more evident, than that of ourselves we can do nothing. Beware, therefore, of undertaking any thing in your own strength; but go in the strength of the Lord God, and in his name set up your banners. And if you thus wait upon him, you shall renew your strength; his grace will ever be sufficient for you; and he that hath begun a good work in you, will carry it on, till at last he perfect it in glory.

S E R.

SERMON XXVI.

THE CONVERSION OF SINNERS, A JUST CAUSE
OF JOY.

LUKE XV. 23, 24.

Let us eat and be merry: for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.

THESE words are part of our Saviour's parable of the prodigal son, a parable so instructive and affecting, that it well deserves your serious consideration. It was delivered by way of reproof to those self-righteous Pharisees, who murmured at our Saviour, because he freely admitted publicans and sinners to be his hearers, and sometimes conversed with them, in order to reclaim them. With this view, he represents to them in the most lively manner the extravagant folly, and the miserable consequences, of a vicious and licentious life. He unfolds the genuine feelings of a sinner's soul, when once brought to himself, and rendered sensible of his danger and guilt. But especially, he discovers, in the most surprising manner, the compassion of an offended God to the chief of sinners, and how highly he is pleased with their conversion. Thus, when the prodigal came to himself; when he conceived

conceived the intention of returning to his father, and was putting his resolution in practice: while he is yet afar off, the father is represented as seeing him, as running to meet him, and embracing him with as much kindness as if he had never offended; nay, as restoring him to the highest marks of paternal affection. "He said to his servants, bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet; and bring hither the fatted calf and kill it; and let us eat and be merry (a)." And then, in the text, he justifies their mirth and joy on this occasion, by assigning the reason of it: "For this my son," says he, "was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found."

In these words, three things offer themselves to our consideration: *First*, The description of a sinner before his conversion: *Secondly*, The happy change produced in his state and practice upon that event: *Lastly*, This change mentioned as a justifiable ground of the highest joy.

These three particulars, we propose through Divine assistance briefly to illustrate; and then conclude with some practical improvement.

I. Let us consider the description here given us, of a sinner before conversion.

You see it consists of two parts, and each of them very significant. He is represented as dead and lost: both which expressions present to us, in a lively manner, the misery and wretchedness of his condition.

A sinner, before his conversion, is represented as dead. This is a very common figure or emblem in holy scripture. Thus in 1 Tim. v. 6. he that liveth in pleasure is said to be dead while he liveth; in Eph. ii. 1. unconverted sinners are said to be dead in trespasses and sins; and in chapter v. 14. they are called upon not only to awake out of sleep, but to arise from the dead.

II

(a) Luke xv. 22, 23.

It is almost unnecessary to observe, that when sinners are represented as dead, it is not meant that they are destitute of natural or animal life: nor does it import, that they are devoid of all capacity of being restored to spiritual life, any more than the prodigal was incapable of being made alive, in the sense and account of his father. No: sinners, before their conversion, are naturally alive as well as others; and though their reasonable powers are indeed wofully perverted, yet they are not extinguished. Their understandings render them capable of thought and consideration, of reflecting on the miserable condition to which their sins have reduced them, and the gracious offers of divine mercy for their recovery. And though their wills are indeed enslaved by sensual lusts, yet they still retain that power of choice and self-determination which is essential to man.

But the expression in the text imports in it two things:—that an unconverted sinner is destitute of spiritual or divine life; and that he is virtually under a sentence of eternal death.

1. An unconverted sinner is destitute of spiritual or divine life. As the prodigal was dead to his father when he was gone from him, and spending his substance in riotous living, so an unconverted sinner is dead to God his Creator and Sovereign. He is engaged in a voluntary rebellion against him; and not at all disposed to live to his glory. He has no prevailing fear of God, or affection to him. On the contrary, he has a strong aversion to him in his heart; or, in the expressive language of the apostle, the heart is enmity itself against him. It is true, indeed, unconverted sinners are alive in a natural sense. They eat, drink, and sleep; they move and walk as well as others; they rejoice in the work of their hands; and many of them spend their days in pleasure, and then go down to the grave. But this deserves not the name of life; it is rather styled death in scripture; because, though they live, their
their

their life is without God in the world; it is alienated from the life of God, and destitute of real comfort. And therefore, though naturally alive, they are said to be dead, dead in sin, and even to abide in death.

And there is great reason why an unconverted state should be represented by the metaphor of death; for there is nothing in nature that more fitly represents it. As in a dead body no vital motions appear; so in an unrenewed soul, there are no motions of divine life; no breathings after God, and spiritual enjoyments; no zeal for his glory, or devotion to his interest. As a dead body is devoid of all sense and feeling; so is the soul of an unconverted sinner: insensible to its misery and danger, it feels not the wounds which sin has given it, it trembles not at the wrath of God with which it is threatened, and, though standing on the very brink of eternal ruin, will use no means to avoid it. And as a dead body is a ghastly and undesirable object, which cannot be viewed with any degree of pleasure; so an unconverted sinner, especially a profligate and licentious one, is a spectacle most loathsome and abominable, in the eyes of a pure and holy God. Upon these, and many other accounts, an unregenerate state is fitly represented to us under the notion of death.

In a word, we may say with propriety of every unconverted sinner, as the apostle does of the person who lives in impure pleasures, "that he is dead while he lives; dead in sin, and ignorant of the valuable purposes for which he received existence."

2. He is virtually under a sentence of eternal death. As we commonly say of a criminal condemned to die, that he is a dead man; so it may well be said of an impenitent sinner, that he is dead; dead in the eye of the law, as being condemned by its just sentence. Thus it was with Adam, when by his first transgression he incurred that dreadful curse; "In the day thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die." Thus,

also,

also, it is with every individual of his posterity, while unrenewed in their minds. Accordingly, our Saviour speaks of every unbeliever as condemned already; and as one on whom the wrath of God does actually abide: "The wages of sin is death." And sinners, as the apostle emphatically expresses it, are the children of wrath, heirs of misery and destruction; subject to the agonies of the second death, and exposed to the lake that burneth for ever with fire and brimstone; living only by reprieve, and liable every moment, at the pleasure of the Sovereign, to be called out to execution. And this is the condition, not merely of the most profligate and abandoned, but of every sinner without exception, while he continues impenitent and unconverted.

But farther: a sinner before his conversion, is here represented not only as dead, but as lost. In which expression, there seems to be an allusion to the parable of the lost sheep in the beginning of this chapter. A sheep, when it strays from the fold is said to be lost; and with sufficient propriety, for it is then useless and unprofitable to the owner, and besides is in danger of perishing, by becoming the prey of some wild beast.

Now, in both these senses, an unconverted sinner may be said to be lost.

(1.) He is lost to the service of God his rightful owner. What the apostle says of one sinner before his conversion, that "in time past he was unprofitable," may justly be said of impenitent sinners in general. Though they have many talents committed to them, many privileges and opportunities put into their hands, yet they are negligent and slothful; like the unprofitable servant in the parable, they hide their talent in a napkin, and stand all the day idle in God's vineyard. Hence they are represented in scripture, as cumberers of the ground. They are compared to briars and thorns which are mischievous; or
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at least unprofitable: nay, they are said to be trees twice dead, plucked up by the roots. The light of the gospel shines round about them, the heavenly dew descends upon them in a greater or less quantity; but all to no purpose, unless, by their own sinful abuse, to render them more and more unfruitful. Thus they are lost to the service of God, to the good of others, and to the safety and happiness of their own souls. And what then can they in reason expect, but to have that dreadful sentence pronounced upon them? "Cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth (a)."

(2.) He is lost, as being every moment in danger of perishing for ever. The father of the prodigal reckoned his son lost, when he wandered from his observation, and abandoned himself to his own pursuits: much more may we reckon an impenitent sinner lost. For, having wilfully departed from God, he forfeits his care and protection: and being thus left to himself; being, as the Psalmist expresses it, "given up to his own heart's lust," he wanders in his own counsels, and is every moment in danger of plunging into endless misery. Like a benighted traveller, whose way is near pits and snares, and who has no able guide to direct him; every step he takes is at the peril of his life. Nay, he runs with fatal precipitancy in the way marked out for him by Satan, or by his own corrupt heart. And what will the end of these things be! Surely the way in which the sinner walks, leads down to the gulph of endless misery; for indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, shall be the everlasting portion of every soul that doth evil.

This, then, is the deplorable case of the sinner before his conversion. He is destitute of spiritual life, and bound over by his guilt to eternal death. He is lost to the service of God his rightful owner, and every moment in danger of perishing for ever.

(a) Matt. xxv. 30.

II. I now come to present to you a more bright and desirable scene, the happy change produced in the sinner's state and practice upon his conversion. "He that was dead is made alive again, and he that was lost is found."

1. He that was dead, is now made alive; that is, he is restored to spiritual and divine life, and thereby raised to the hope of eternal life.

(1.) The sinner, upon his conversion, is restored to spiritual and divine life. He that was formerly a natural man, is now made spiritual and alive to God. He that by sin was a child of the devil, is now made a child of God. As it was said of Caleb, that he had "another spirit with him (a);" so may it justly be said of a real convert, that he is a man of another spirit, being quite altered and changed from what he was before. His understanding, that formerly was blind and insensible, is now, in some measure, savingly enlightened. The stubborn and rebellious will is rendered obedient and submissive to the will of God. The affections that before were disorderly, impure, and sensual, are now elevated to heavenly objects. His great conflict is against the remains of sin, the snares of life, and the opposition of Satan in his Christian course. His heart breathes after God, and Christ and holiness; and the chief study and business of his life is to walk in a manner becoming the gospel. In a word, he now lives, not to himself, but to God; he is quickened from his death in sin, and recovered to a holy and heavenly life. And,

(2.) He is thereby raised to the hope of eternal life. For those principles of holiness implanted in his soul, are the seed of a blessed immortality. Accordingly, they are represented by our Saviour, as a well of water springing up to everlasting life. A sinner, upon his conversion, has the Spirit within him, as a sure pledge and earnest of his future inheritance. That

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spiritual light set up in his mind, is to him the dawning of eternal day; that grace sown in his heart, is as the bud of eternal glory; and that inward peace which he enjoys, is the first-fruits of everlasting happiness. Nay, he has sometimes those lively foretastes of heaven, those refreshing views of the better country, which in appearance carry him for a while above the world, enable him to rejoice in hope, and even to long to depart and be with Christ. Hence, he that was once dead, dead to all comfortable hope, as well as dead in sin, may now be truly said to be made alive.

But, 2. Upon the conversion of a sinner, he that was lost is now found. He is found,

(1.) In respect of God, to whose service he returns.

Formerly, he was as a sheep going astray, but he is now returned to the compassionate Shepherd and Bishop of souls. Formerly, he was under the dominion of sin, and tyranny of Satan; the power of lust was predominant in him, and led him captive at its pleasure: but now he is recovered from this miserable bondage, and devotes himself to the service of his God. Formerly, the current of his desires run strong toward some worldly good; but now the language of his heart is, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee: Lord, lift upon me the light of thy countenance." Formerly, the powers of his mind were alienated from God, and directed to the gratification of his lusts; but they are now dedicated to the honour of his God, and employed in his praise. In a word, "As he is not now his own, but bought with a price, he glorifies God in his body, and in his spirit, which are his (b)."

(2.) In respect of his own true advantage. For now he is plucked as a brand out of the fire; he is rescued

rescued from the slavery of sin. Nay, God himself vouchsafes to give him his love and favour; he is brought under the care of his indulgent providence; he enjoys the conduct of his grace; and is now therefore likely to be safe for ever in his heavenly kingdom. He is become, in a word, one of those sheep, concerning which our Lord tells us, that "he knows them, and will give unto them eternal life; that they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of his hands (c)."

Thus you see the happy state of a sinner upon his conversion, the comfortable change produced in his circumstances. He that was dead in sin, and under the curse of the law, is now made alive to God, and restored to the hope of eternal life. He that was lost to the service of God, and every moment in danger of perishing, is now brought home to the fold of Christ, and under his care shall be for ever safe.

But, *Lastly*, This is mentioned in the text as a justifiable ground of the highest joy. Let us eat and be merry: for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.

Now, this will be evident, if we consider either the glory that thereby redounds to God, or the benefit and happiness which accrue to the converted sinner himself.

1. The conversion of a sinner will appear to be a solid ground of the highest joy, if we consider the glory which by that means redounds to the Almighty. The advancement of the divine glory is certainly the most justifiable ground of joy. And nothing surely is more eminently conducive to this, than a sinner's conversion: for this is the work of God himself; a work which, above all others, manifests the glory of his infinite mercy and omnipotent grace. Hence, it is spoken of in scripture as that which shows the exceeding greatness of his power, and the glory and

riches of his grace. By this means, Christ obtains the most glorious triumph over his enemies, and erects his throne on the ruins of Satan's empire. By this means, there is one subject more added to his kingdom, and one child to his family; one more, in whose salvation the virtue of Christ's atonement shall be displayed, and the victorious influence of his grace for ever magnified. By this means, in a word, one sheep more is added to the fold of Christ, and one member to his mystical body, whose future dignity and happiness shall be an accession to the glory of his exalted Head and Lord, when he comes to be glorified in his saints, and admired in them that believe. And surely, when the glory of God and the Redeemer is so highly advanced by a sinner's conversion, this is, and will be, ground of real joy to every sincere believer.

2. This will appear, if we consider the benefit and happiness that thereby accrue to the sinner himself.

Christian charity should dispose us to desire the welfare and happiness of others, and to welcome the tidings of it with unfeigned joy. Now, the conversion of a sinner is the greatest blessing he can be possessed of; it is a favour in which the salvation of his soul is concerned, and a mercy unspeakably greater than can be conceived: for by means of it, he that was dead in sin and under the curse, is now made alive to God; and he that was lost, is happily found. And surely, if the temporal good of others be the ground of joy, much more should their spiritual and eternal welfare. Is it matter of joy when a diseased patient is recovered, and a miserable captive set at liberty? and shall we not rejoice when a dead sinner is restored to spiritual life, when a slave of Satan is redeemed from this wretched bondage, and a child of wrath becomes an adopted child of God, and heir of heaven? This we are told is a subject of the highest joy to the blessed angels above; for there is joy in heaven over one sinner

sinners that repenteth: And if these benevolent spirits rejoice at the conversion of a sinner, it becomes us to do so likewise.

It now only remains that we bring home what has been said to your consciences, by a particular application.

I would, *1st*, Address myself to unconverted sinners. And oh that I knew what words to choose, or what arguments to urge, that might possibly prevail with you.

(1.) Reflect seriously upon the misery of your present state.

You are here represented as dead, dead in sin, and under the curse. Though you live and act in a natural sense, and with respect to the affairs of this world; yet, with respect to those of your souls and eternity, you are under the power of spiritual death. Now, to convince you of this, look into your own hearts, and try if the following signs of spiritual death do not belong to you. You have no sense or feeling of your misery and danger; no such sense, I mean, as thoroughly to awaken you to fly to Christ the only remedy. You have no spiritual motions towards Christ, or things that are spiritual, no breathings after communion with God, and conformity to him: a sure sign of spiritual death; for, were there a principle of life in your souls, it would point towards heaven, and be in you a well of water springing up to everlasting life. You have no appetite for spiritual food; you favour not the things that be of God; nay, during the whole period of your lives, you can remain without any communion between God and your souls: a thing that could never take place, if you were not spiritually dead. You have no heat or spiritual warmth in your affections to God and things above. Your hearts indeed are warmed to the world by your lusts; but how cold and dead are they towards Christ and spiritual

objects ! And finally, you have no real concern for your own preservation ; the wrath of God hangs over you ; you are upon the very brink of destruction ; and yet will make use of no means to avoid it. How plain is it, then, that your souls are spiritually dead ! Nay, you are proceeding from spiritual death to death eternal, being bound over thereto by the righteous sentence of the law of God, and every moment in danger of the execution of it. Now, if this be your dreadful condition, be not at rest till you are made alive to God by Jesus Christ. Of all things, the most dreadful and lamentable is the death of thy precious soul. Awake, then, ye that are dead in sin ; arise, and Christ will give you life.

You are also represented as lost. With regard to all those excellent purposes for which you were created, you are useless and unserviceable to God. You have hitherto frustrated the design of redeeming grace. Nay, you are estranged from God, the slaves of sin, and in danger of eternal misery. And is this a situation in which you would wish to continue ? Is this a state in which you can rest satisfied ? Will you not open your eyes to see your danger ? Will you not at last come to yourselves, and entertain serious thoughts of returning to God ?

2. Be persuaded then to return to God, that so it may be said of you, that though you were once dead, you are now alive ; though you were lost, you are now found. To persuade you to this, let me urge upon you the argument suggested in the text.

Consider what a solid foundation of joy your conversion will be. The great God himself will rejoice in it : He has no pleasure in the death of sinners, but in their repentance and salvation. The blessed angels will rejoice in it : It will be welcome news to them, if any of you are delivered from the power of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son. The children of God, and the faithful
ministers

ministers of Christ will rejoice in it. Nay, let me tell you, you yourselves will have the greatest reason to rejoice in it, and will review this change in your nature and state with the highest satisfaction.

I now conclude with a few advices to those who are converted to God.

1. Rejoice in your own conversion. Bless God, and be thankful. Consider how important the favour; how few there are who partake of it; and in the midst of how much opposition his grace has laid hold on your souls.

2. Rejoice in the conversion of others; and let it appear you do so by your earnest endeavours to promote it. Labour to be the happy instruments of turning some sinner from the error of his way; for in consequence of this, you will save a soul from death, and cover a multitude of sins.

Lastly, Wish and long for that blessed world, where your salvation shall be complete, where Christ, who is your life, will receive you to himself, and make you dwell for ever in his immediate presence. Amen.

SER.

power, with this extraordinary manifestation, that made a sudden pause even after he had begun to pray; and like one doubtful whether he should say more the testimony of his own senses, and simply the question, "But will God in very deed dwell with man upon earth? Behold, heaven, and the heaven of heavens cannot contain Thee: how much less this house that I have built?"

SERMON XXVII.

ON PRAISING GOD.

From the last, when the tabernacle was first erected in the Wilderness, God was pleased to take visible possession of it in a way similar to what is here recorded; and the effect is enough not greatly the same, had a very great resemblance to those which we have now read, for we are there told, that "Moses came in of God, and the Lord said unto him, Stand on the top of the mountain, and thou shalt see the land which I have sworn to give unto the children of Israel." **2 CHRON. V. 13, 14.**

It came even to pass, as the trumpeters and singers were as one, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the Lord; and when they lift up their voice with the trumpets and cymbals, and instruments of musick, and praised the Lord, saying, For he is good, for his mercy endureth for ever: that then the house was filled with a cloud, even the house of the Lord; so that the priests could not stand to minister by reason of the cloud: for the glory of the Lord had filled the house of God.

THE day of Pentecost excepted, when the Holy Ghost made a visible descent upon the apostles of our Lord, we may consider this as the brightest day with which the church was ever favoured. It is impossible to conceive the joy, the wonder, the ecstasy of these devout worshippers, when they beheld the cloud, that well known symbol of the Divine presence, and saw the temple filled with the glory of the Lord. Solomon himself, as we learn from the 18th verse of the following chapter, was so over-
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powered with this extraordinary manifestation, that he made a sudden pause even after he had begun to pray; and like one doubtful whether he should believe the testimony of his own senses, abruptly asks the question, "But will God in very deed dwell with man upon earth? Behold, heaven, and the heaven of heavens cannot contain Thee: how much less this house that I have built?"

From the last chapter of Exodus it appears, that when the tabernacle was first erected in the Wilderness, God was pleased to take visible possession of it, in a way similar to what is here recorded; and the effects, though not precisely the same, had a very great resemblance to those which we have now read. For we are there told, that "Moses the man of God, was not able to enter into the tent of the congregation, because the cloud abode thereon, and the glory of the Lord had filled the tabernacle." Here, however, the cloud not only filled the tabernacle, but the whole temple; and the Divine presence was displayed with such glory and majesty, that the priests who burned incense at the golden altar, were obliged, at least for a time, to intermit the service. "They could not stand to minister by reason of the cloud; for the glory of the Lord had filled the house of God."

It is unnecessary to observe to you, that such pompous and visible manifestations of the Divine presence are not to be expected in the days of the gospel. The darkness of the former dispensation required those external aids, and rendered them not only desirable, but useful and necessary. But now, when the darkness is dispelled, and the day-spring from on high has visited us, the great objects of faith, being freed from the thick veil of types and shadows, affect the mind without the assistance of our bodily senses, and make a deeper and more lasting impression upon the soul of the believer than the most splendid

scenes the eye could behold. Zion's glory does not now consist in outward pomp and magnificence, but in the spiritual, though invisible presence of her King; according to his own gracious promise, "Lo, I am with you alway, even to the end of the world;" and again, "Where two or three are met together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." When divine power accompanies the ordinances of religion; when these waters of the sanctuary are impregnated with a healing and quickening virtue; when the souls of believers are enlightened and purified, revived and comforted by the use of those means which Christ has appointed, then is the temple filled with his glory, and there is no need of any visible cloud to convince the devout worshipper that God is with him.

It has long been lamented, (would to God there was less cause for it), that this gracious presence of our Redeemer is sensibly withdrawn from our public assemblies. We have heard with our ears, and our fathers have told us what works the Lord did in their days, in the times of old; how his steps of majesty have been seen in the sanctuary, and his arm revealed by its glorious effects, turning the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, enriching and beautifying the souls of his own people with righteousness, peace and joy in believing. But, alas! how is the gold become dim, and the most fine gold changed! These blessed fruits of the ordinances of the gospel are now rarely to be seen, and there is too much ground for that complaint; "The bellows are burnt, and the lead is consumed of the fire; the founder melteth in vain, for the wicked are not pluckt away from their wickedness." Few, comparatively speaking, are now converted by the means of grace; and even among those few who have a name to live, the decayed and languid state of Christianity is too observable to need any proof or illustration. To what cause
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then shall we impute this? Is God's arm shortened, that it cannot save? or his ear heavy, that he cannot hear? Is his mercy clean gone for ever? Doth his promise fail for evermore? Hath the Lord forgotten to be gracious? Hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies? No; God is unchangeable, the same to-day, yesterday, and for ever, without any variableness or shadow of turning. He is a rock; his work is perfect, and all his ways are judgment; a God of truth and inviolable fidelity. The blame therefore must be thrown entirely on ourselves. Our iniquities have separated between God and us, and withheld good things from us. We do not cry to him with our hearts. We do not stir up ourselves to call upon God. Our prayers are cold and lifeless. Our praises languish on our lips. We rush on ordinances without any serious preparation; and are neither suitably concerned to obtain the divine presence, nor properly affected when we miss it.

That this is too frequently the case, will not, cannot be denied. Our own observation and experience must convince us of the truth of it. But may I not be allowed to hope, that many have come upon this occasion with ardent desires to behold and admire the beauty of the Lord, and to feel the power of his grace in the sanctuary? May I not hope that there is here a goodly number, who, like Moses, have been pleading in their hour of private meditation, "I beseech thee, O Lord, show me thy glory."

And since the passage upon which I am now discoursing, affords matter of useful and seasonable instruction; as it not only relates an extraordinary manifestation of the Divine glory to his ancient church, but likewise informs us how the worshippers were employed at the time it was made: I think the inference is perfectly just and natural, that if we desire and expect to share in their privilege, we ought, in
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so far as the difference of our circumstances will permit, to follow their example, and do what they did.

Observe then, 1st, That the glory of God began to appear when the assembly was employed in praise and thanksgiving. This is a striking circumstance, and deserves our particular attention. Much time had been spent in the solemn duties of another kind. Numerous and costly sacrifices had been offered up, even sheep and oxen, that could not be told for number. But the ritual parts of worship were all concluded before the cloud entered into the temple. God delayed to honour them with this token of his favour, till the spiritual and heavenly exercise of praise was begun. Praise is by far the most acceptable service in which we can be engaged. Of this David was sensible, when he said, "I will praise the name of God with a song, and will magnify him with thanksgiving. This also shall please the Lord better than an ox or bullock that hath horns and hoofs." Hence God so highly distinguishes this duty on the present occasion. Prayer is an expression of our indigence and weakness. Thanksgiving expresses our relish of the sweetness of benefits received. But praise rises above all temporal regard, and directly terminates on the greatness and amiableness of God himself. He loves our prayers, he loves our penitential tears; but nothing delights him so much as the cheerful adoration and praise of his people. Nay, penitential tears are no otherwise availing, than as they are expressive of our purification from the filth of sin. All the other duties of devotion are only means of preparation for this sublime exercise. The habitation of the blessed continually resound with the high praises of God. Hence the most perfect creatures, in their most perfect state, have this for their constant and unwearied employment. They rest not day nor night, crying, "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come."

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We live too much in the neglect of this heavenly exercise, and this perhaps is one reason that we enjoy so little of heaven upon earth. Did we praise God more, he would give us greater cause to praise him. But of this we seldom think. We are anxious to solicit relief when we are in dangerous or distressful circumstances; but how slowly do we return to give glory to God! Let me therefore intreat you, in all your addresses to the throne of grace, to give praise and thanks their due proportion. In days of humiliation, or in some special case of distress, our sins and our danger may have the greater share; but in ordinary cases, as much of our time ought to be employed in humble and thankful adoration of the Divine greatness and goodness, as in confession of our sins, or begging those supplies which our wants require. That excellent model of devotion which Christ has left to his church, lays a solid foundation for this regulation. It both begins and ends with adoration; and in the three petitions which are first in order, directly related to the advancement of God's glory. We are taught to pray that his name may be hallowed; his kingdom come; and his will be done on earth, as it is in heaven; before we beg anything for ourselves. In particular, it holds us but shortly, and with no assistance, before we desire to experience the Divine presence, and see the glory of his kingdom on earth, and let us apply ourselves to this high and heavenly work. The occasion of our present meeting gives us a fair invitation to it. The great object which this day presents to us, is the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world. In the sacrament, we are to behold Christ evidently set forth as crucified before our eyes; And can we refrain from adoration and praise, whilst we contemplate Him, who is the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person? Should we not rejoice and give thanks, while we are called to commemorate the unspeakable gift of God?

to man? Every Lord's day bespeaks our praise and thanksgiving: but the particular language of a communion Sabbath, is evidently this, "Let Israel rejoice in Him that made him. Let the children of Zion be joyful in their King. Praise the Lord, for it is good to sing praises to our God; for it is pleasant, and praise is comely."

2. It deserves our notice, that the subject of praise, which God honoured with this token of acceptance, was his own goodness and everlasting mercy. And this is a most encouraging circumstance; for it informs us, in the plainest manner, that God is best pleased with our praises, when we adore and celebrate the perfections of his nature. The song which the priests were singing when the cloud entered the temple, had none of that rhetorical pomp, which a cold heart may borrow from a warm imagination. It consisted of a few plain, but expressive words; "The Lord is good, and his mercy endureth for ever." And whilst they thus sung, the Lord caused them to feel the effects of that goodness which they praised. And shall not this success encourage us to follow their example? They adored and celebrated the Divine goodness, when the ark was brought into the temple, which was only a typical representation of the Messiah who was to come; and shall we need any solicitation to adopt their song, who know that the mercy promised to the fathers, the consolation of Israel, is already come: especially when we attend upon that sacred ordinance, which is both a commemoration of his past sufferings, and a pledge of his returning to complete our salvation. Here, indeed, we have the brightest display of the goodness and everlasting mercy of God. God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. God sent his Son, not to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved. Our Great Redeemer

deemer is the liveliest image of infinite goodness; the messenger of the most astonishing and incomprehensible love; the purchaser of the most inestimable blessings that were ever revealed to the sons of men. "Greater love than this hath no man, that a man lay down his life for his friends." Can we doubt of the Divine goodness after this costly expression of it? "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?"

Behold, likewise, the adorable perfection shining through the whole of that gracious covenant, of which this sacrament is an external seal. There you may see such great and wonderful mercies given freely to sinners, as may remove all your suspicion of the Divine goodness and mercy, and afford you constant matter of gratitude and praise. There you may see how unwilling God is that sinners should perish. There you may see an act of pardon and oblivion granted upon the easy and reasonable condition of believing, penitent, and thankful acceptance. The sins that men have been committing for many years together, their wilful, heinous, highly aggravated sins, you may there see pardoned; the enemies of God reconciled to him; condemned rebels saved from hell, and even brought into his family, and made his sons. What comfortable discoveries are these! The saints under the dispensation of the Old Testament saw them darkly through a vail, whereas we behold them with open face. God appears in his Son and covenant, to be not only good, but Love itself. Let us then adore him in this amiable character. Let us give him the glory of all his perfections; but especially, let us praise him with thankful hearts, because he is good, and his mercy endureth for ever.

3. Another circumstance in the text that claims our attention, is, the seriousness and fervour of this devout assembly. It is said, that they lifted up their

voice, and praised the Lord. They exerted their whole strength and activity, as if they had been ambitious to spend themselves in this heavenly employment. Would we then obtain a token of the Divine acceptance? Let us learn from their example, to seek it with a fervent and lively devotion. "Great is the Lord," says David, "and greatly to be praised." Accordingly, when he enters upon this important duty, in the 103d Psalm, he begins with a solemn address to his own soul, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name." The devotion of the soul, is the soul of devotion. It is the praise and homage of the heart which God requires. If that is withheld, we have nothing else to offer him, that is worthy of his regard. We are desired to love the Lord with all our hearts, and all our soul, with all our strength, and with all our mind; and that which is the measure of our love, ought also to be the measure of our praise. For it is as impossible to exceed in the one, as in the other. As we cannot love him too much, neither can we praise him too highly. His greatness and his goodness infinitely surpass all that our minds can conceive, or our tongues express.

4. Another circumstance which deserves particular attention, is, the harmony and unanimity of these devout worshippers. They were as one, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the Lord. The importance of this circumstance will appear in a stronger light, if we compare the passage now before us with the extraordinary manifestation at the day of Pentecost, which we find recorded in the 2d chapter of Acts. When the apostles were all with one accord in one place, suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were assembled. Every one must be sensible, that there is a very striking resemblance between these two illustrious events; and I cannot

cannot help thinking, that the unanimity and harmony of the worshippers on both these occasions, is mentioned with peculiar emphasis as a distinguishing characteristic of those religious assemblies which God delights to honour with his presence. We are told by the Psalmist, that when "brethren dwell together in unity, there God commandeth the blessing (a)." And our Lord lays such stress upon unity of affection among his disciples, that he makes it an essential qualification of an acceptable worshipper. Nay, he tells us, that where this is wanting, the person is unqualified for performing any service pleasing to God. "If," says he, "thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way. First be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift (m)."

If this doctrine of brotherly love has not an obvious foundation in the text, yet I can hardly think I need make any apology for mentioning it, seeing it has a broad foundation in other passages of scripture, and is strictly connected with the great ordinance before us. The sacrament of the Supper, is not only a solemn commemoration of our Saviour's death, and of his wonderful love to sinners of mankind; but it was likewise intended to be a badge of love and union among his disciples. Of old, they who feasted upon the same sacrifice laid aside all enmity, and professed to be knit together in love and friendship. In like manner, all who partake of the holy sacrament, are supposed to be members of one body, united together under one head, our Lord Jesus Christ. "The cup of blessing, which we bless," says the apostle, "is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread, which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?" It would be monstrous to see one member of the natural body hurting and

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destroying

(a) Psalm 133:

(m) Math. v. 23, 24.

destroying another; and it is no less monstrous and unnatural for one member of Christ's mystical body to be at variance with another; to see those who partake of the table of the Lord, at the same time partaking of the table of Devils, by entertaining hatred or malice in their hearts, by doing, or purposing to do, or even by wishing, any hurt to their brethren in Christ.

Would we then claim the Divine presence and blessing in this solemn action? Do we expect or desire that the King should sit at his own table, and impart to us the fruits of his favour and love: let us be of one mind; and let us put on, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any; remitting to others their hundred pence, whilst we plead with God for the discharge of our ten thousand talents. But the unity here spoken of, seems more immediately to respect their harmonious agreement in the great subject of their praise. They made one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the Lord, saying, For he is good, and his mercy endureth for ever. And when they thus concurred with heart and voice in extolling the mercy and goodness of God, the house was filled with a cloud.—That agreement in prayer has a mighty efficacy, appears from that gracious promise, “I say unto you, that if two of you shall agree on earth, as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven (a).” And my text affords a convincing proof, that agreement in praise, has an equal efficacy to bring the glory of God into the assemblies of his people. We may at least take encouragement from it to make the experiment. We have been asking the Divine presence by prayer; let us go a little farther, and seek it by praise and thanksgiving.

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The Eucharist was the ancient name of this sacrament, which name informs us, that the sacramental devotions of the primitive christians, consisted chiefly in the exercises of praise which I am recommending; and certainly their example ought to have considerable weight with us. Let none say, I am a guilty creature, and therefore, sighs, and tears, and lamentation, become me better than the voice of praise. For, if you are penitent, believing sinners; if, despairing of relief from any other quarter, you have fled for refuge to Christ, and taken sanctuary in his atoning blood and sacrifice, praise is not only lawful, but a necessary part of your present duty. The design of your redemption, the tenor of the gospel-covenant, the glorious privileges to which you stand entitled, all loudly demand this grateful return. "Ye are a chosen generation," says the apostle Peter, "a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light (b)."

But, alas, says one, what is all this to me? my harp must still hang upon the willows; for how shall a wretched captive presume to sing the song of Zion? On my heart no evidences of grace are legible; grief and fear have so thoroughly possessed it, that no place for the love of God remains. How then shall I lift up my voice, whilst my soul is cast down and disquieted within me?

Now, to such I would answer in general, that let your case be as bad as you suppose, yet still you have cause to bless the Lord. If you cannot thank him for his special grace, yet surely you ought to praise him for his unwearied patience, and those offers of mercy which are daily tendered to you. Bless him that you are still on earth, in the land of hope, and not confined to the regions of everlasting despair. But I must

must not stop here. Come forward to the light, thou dark, discouraged soul; and, in the presence of God, give an ingenuous answer to the few following questions.

Thou complaineſt of want of love to God, and thy complaints indeed ſhow, that thou enjoyeſt not the immediate favour of God's countenance. But, is it not ſtill a proof of your love to God, that you feel the want of his preſence, and earneſtly deſire the communication of his love? A man who keenly purſues the things of this world, diſcovers his love to them as convincingly as he who rejoices in the full poſſeſſion of them. The tendency of the heart, appears as truly in an anxious purſuit, as in delightful enjoyment. But, as the weakneſs of hope is often miſtaken for the want of deſire, it is proper to conſider, that your mourning for the abſence of God is a proof of your love. You evince your love for your friends, by grieving for their death, no leſs than by delighting in them when alive. If, when you think God has forſaken you, you heartily lament it as your greateſt unhappineſs and loſs, and believe that you are void of grace, and cannot love and honour him as you would, this is an undoubted evidence, that your hearts are not deſtitute of the love of God.—Farther, Would you not rather have a heart to love God, than all the pleaſures and riches of the world? Would it not comfort you more than any thing elſe, to be aſſured that he loves you, and that you could perfectly love and obey him? If ſo, it is not the want of love, but the want of aſſurance, that cauſeth this diſquiet. And therefore, I charge thee in the name of God, to render unto him the tribute of praiſe which is due. To be much employed in this heavenly exerciſe, has an evident tendency to vanquiſh all hurtful doubts and fears, by keeping the ſoul near to God, and within the influence of his love and goodneſs; by diſſipating miſtruſtful vexing thoughts,
and

and directing the mind to more delightful employment; by keeping the Tempter at a distance, who is usually least able to follow us, when we are highest in the praises of our God and Saviour; and especially by affording evidence of our sincerity.

Come, then, and make the experiment. Obey that voice which proceedeth out of the throne, saying, Praise our God, all ye his servants, and ye that fear him, both small and great. Let no voice be wanting on this solemn occasion; but let us all be as one, praising and thanking the Lord, whilst we commemorate his goodness and everlasting love. And then we may hope, that he will grace our communion table with his presence, and fill all his guests with the fulness of his house.

S E R.

SERMON XXVIII.

ON THE PRESENCE OF CHRIST IN THE ORDINANCES OF RELIGION.

MATT. xviii. 20.

For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.

THESE words are our Lord's promise to his disciples, of his presence with them, when employed in social worship.

In the preceding verse he expressly assures them, that if any two of them should agree together on earth concerning any thing which they shall ask in prayer, it should be done for them by his Father in heaven. This assurance, though it evidently refers to a miraculous answer of prayer, is, however, a powerful encouragement to Christians in every situation, by joint prayer and supplication, to make their requests known to God. And this plainly appears from the general promise subjoined in the text; "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

In these words we have an explicit appointment of public worship. It is here evidently supposed, that
Christians

Christians ought to meet together for prayer and other acts of devotion. This is the will of Christ, the King and Head of the church; and absolutely necessary for the honour of God, and for preserving a sense of religion in the world.

In these words we are also directed to the manner in which we ought to meet together for public worship. It is in the name of Christ; that is, from a regard to his authority, and in humble dependence on his righteousness and grace; for he is the way, the truth, and the life; and no man cometh to the Father but by him. The name of Christ is that precious propitiating name, which, like the incense under the law, must perfume our spiritual sacrifices, and render them acceptable to God.

And we have, lastly, an express assurance of his presence with us, as an encouragement to meet together in the name of Christ: "Where two or three," says he, "are gathered together, in my name, there am I in the midst of them." In this expression there seems to be an allusion to the custom in the Jewish assemblies of the president's sitting in the midst, where he might equally hear, and be heard by all. In like manner, says our Saviour, will I be present, in the midst of my saints and people, when assembled together in my name. By which it is evident, we are not merely to understand his essential presence as God, which equally extends to all places; but a promise of his special and gracious presence with his church and people, in their religious assemblies.

In discoursing farther on this subject, we propose, by Divine assistance, *First*, To consider what this presence of Christ is, which is here promised. *Secondly*, We shall endeavour to establish the truth of the doctrine, or show you, that Christ is really, though invisibly, present with his people in ordinances: And then

then conclude with some practical improvement.—

We propose,

I. To consider what this presence of Christ is, which he promises shall be with his people in his worship and ordinances.

And this presence is nothing else but the inward and powerful operation of his Spirit, accompanying his word and ordinances, and rendering them effectual for quickening and sanctifying, strengthening and comforting the souls of his people. There was a time when the church enjoyed the presence of Christ upon earth; when, as the evangelist expresses it, he dwelt among them, and they beheld his glory; when they saw him with their eyes, and heard the gracious words that proceeded from his lips. This presence of Christ was a singular comfort to his disciples, and therefore they were greatly afflicted when it was to be taken away. But, having finished the work of redemption by his death, and given them the most incontestible proofs of his resurrection, it was no longer necessary that it should be continued. Nay, as he himself tells his disciples, “it was expedient for them that he should go away (a).” Accordingly, he left the world, and ascended to the Father, where the heavens must receive him, until the times of the restitution of all things. But though Christ be now absent in body, though he be now gone to minister within the vail, and, as the exalted Head of his church, to take care of her interests in the higher house; yet he has promised, and sent the Spirit to supply his place in the church; and by Him he is still graciously present with his people.

And what an invaluable mercy is this! what an endearing instance of his care and affection for his people! For this presence of Christ by his Spirit, is that which gives the ordinances of the gospel their beauty

(a) John xvi. 7.

beauty and glory, their power and efficacy, their stability and continuance.

1. Their beauty and glory. Hence we so frequently read in scripture of the beauty of the Lord, and his glory in the sanctuary. In these expressions there is an evident allusion to the ark of the covenant, the symbol of the Divine presence in the days of the Jewish church. The presence of Christ is the source from which his ordinances derive all that beauty and glory of which they are possessed. Of these qualities they are completely deprived by the removal of his Spirit. During the absence of his Spirit, they resemble a body which the living principle ceases to animate. They retain their beauty no longer. In winter when the sun retires, the herbs wither, the trees cast their leaves, and nature assumes a melancholy appearance. In like manner, when the Lord withdraws his presence, the beauty of Zion departs from her. But when he returns in mercy, and pours out his Spirit upon his ordinances, there is a pleasant spring of religion; and glory dwells in our land.

2. From this spiritual presence of Christ, the ordinances of the gospel likewise derive their power and efficacy.

As the waters of the pool of Bethesda were destitute of their healing virtue, except when the angel descended and troubled them; so, when this ministration of the Spirit is wanting, the word and sacraments, those waters of the sanctuary, are wholly unproductive of any saving influence. Paul indeed may plant, Apollos may water, but God alone can give the increase. The ordinary means of grace may awaken your natural powers, and cause a shaking among the dry bones; but it is the Spirit of Christ that must breathe into them the breath of life. And the reason of this is plain: Ordinances act not as natural and necessary, but only as instituted means, which

are successful or not, according as Christ by his Spirit operates with them.

Lastly, This spiritual presence of Christ gives the ordinances of the gospel their stability and continuance.

That God is in the midst of her, is not only in a peculiar manner the glory of Zion; it is likewise the foundation on which her stability rests. Were the Spirit of God to be withdrawn from ordinances, in a little time the ordinances themselves would be likewise withdrawn. When the Lord of glory departed from between the Cherubims, when the dismal voice was heard in the temple, "Let us go hence;" how soon was both the temple and city destroyed! Or, if the ordinances should be suffered to remain with a people, after the Spirit is withdrawn: their continuance, in that case, would be of no advantage; and instead of proving the happy means of quickening and conversion to sinners, they would only retain a killing and hardening power, by which they would prove the favour of death unto death. Justly, therefore, might the Lord say to his ancient people, "Wo also to them, when I depart from them (*m*)."
How much reason then have we to be afraid, lest, by our unbelief and contempt of the gospel, we banish the presence of Christ from amongst us, and provoke him at last to remove even our candlestick out of its place.—We proposed,

II. To confirm the truth of the doctrine, or show you, that Christ is really, though invisibly, present with his people in ordinances.

This is a truth, which, however much discredited by the enemies of religion, none, I hope, will deny, who acknowledge the authority of the holy scriptures. It is evident from declarations in these scriptures, from the many precious promises to this purpose,
from

from the constant experience of the saints, and from the supernatural effects which the ordinances produce on the souls of men.

1. From express scripture declarations. In the book of Psalms, God is said to be in the midst of Zion; the Church is called his rest, his chosen habitation, and the place where his honour dwells. And in the same book his presence is compared to a river, the streams whereof make glad the city of God. When the Spouse, full of longing affection, desires to know where she may meet her Beloved, "Tell me," says she, "O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest, where thou makest thy flocks to rest at noon;" he directs her to the public ordinances: "If thou knowest not," says he, "O thou fairest among women, go thy ways forth by the footsteps of the flock, and feed thy kids beside the shepherds tents (n)." Hence also, the Church is styled the place of his feet, in allusion to the ark, which is called God's footstool. And to mention no more, Christ is described in Revelations, as walking in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks, that is, in his churches, in the assemblies of his saints. Thither, therefore, the believer goes to meet with him, expecting the clearest discoveries of his glory, and the most delightful manifestations of his love.

2. From the precious promises to this purpose recorded in sacred scripture. Many promises of this kind are inserted in the Old Testament, and they enrich and adorn the New. How express and encouraging is that promise to the people of Israel. "In all places where I record my name, I will come to my people and bless them (i)." Has he not promised, that he will be as the dew to Israel; that he will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground; and that in consequence of this, his people shall be willing in the day of his power? In

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(n) Cant. i. 7, 8.

(i) Exod. xx. 24.

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(*i*) Exod. xx. 24.

the New Testament, the promises of Christ's presence by his Spirit, are so rich and full, and these accomplished in so remarkable a manner, that the apostle expressly calls it the ministration of the Spirit (*c*). Nor was this presence of Christ the peculiar privilege of the first churches; it is promised without exception to the assemblies of the saints, to the very end of time. "And lo, I am with you always," says our Saviour himself, "even unto the end of the world." Upon this promise we may stedfastly rely; for it is the promise of the faithful Witness. And may not every believer plead with him in the words of the Psalmist; "Remember thy word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope?"

3. From the experience of all those who have sincerely drawn nigh to him in the ordinances of public worship: and though this fact be little regarded by those who are strangers to its truth, yet to the man who has experience of it, and tasted that the Lord is gracious, it will carry more conviction than ten thousand arguments. And, blessed be God, there is a cloud of witnesses to attest this sacred truth. How many, while waiting upon him in his ordinances, have had their minds enlightened, their fears dispelled, and their strength renewed! The history of the Church, in former ages, abounds with testimonies to this purpose. Your time would fail me to mention the experiences of David, Asaph, and other Old Testament saints; of whom it may be justly said in general, "They have seen thy goings, O God, even the goings of their God, their King, in the sanctuary (*b*)."

I shall therefore only take notice of the triumphant language of the Church, in the Song of Solomon; "I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste. He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love."

And

(*c*) 2 Cor. iii. 8.

(*b*) Psal. lxiil. 24.

And may I not even appeal to the experience of many in this assembly? Christians, are you not now saying, "I was in darkness, but I went into the sanctuary, and there the Lord vouchsafed to give me light; I was dead in sin, and there he quickened and raised me to a Divine life; I was mourning and despairing, and there I found a word of comfort, and of sacred joy?" Nay, have you not sometimes been made to say of his ordinances, as Jacob did of Bethel; "Surely the Lord is in this place; this is none other but the house of God; this is the gate of heaven?"—Whatever a blinded world may say, you can no more doubt the reality of Christ's presence with you in ordinances, than you can doubt the sun shines, when you see his light, and feel the warmth of his beams.

Lastly, From the supernatural effects, which the ordinances produce on the souls of men.

Whence is it, that the secure sinner is awakened, and the spiritually dead raised to life? Have the ordinances any power in themselves to produce such effects? Or can the ablest and holiest ministers render them effectual? Can the vanishing breath of a dying man inspire spiritual life into the souls of others? Can he search the conscience, break the heart, and bow the will at his pleasure? No; the ordinances in themselves are but a dead letter, till the living Spirit infuse his quickening influences: and though as Paul should plant, and an Apollos water, it is God alone that can give the increase. Let us therefore earnestly pray for this presence and operation of Christ with his ordinances, that it may be said from time to time, "This and that man was born there (a)."

But not to insist on these particulars, I shall only mention a few of those gracious effects which the presence of Christ with his people, or his drawing nigh to them in ordinances, leaves on their spirits.

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And

(a) Psal. lxxvii. 35.

And the first I shall mention, is the experience which is given them of spiritual joy. Thus we find it was with the pious Psalmist ; " Because thy loving-kindness," says he, " is better than life, my lips shall praise thee (a)." No sooner had the church found him whom her soul loved, than immediately she cries out, " I am my Beloved's, and my Beloved is mine : he feedeth among the lilies." And what is this but a foretaste of celestial happiness, the first fruits of that joy, the fulness whereof is reserved for heaven ?

2. They find themselves more deeply humbled under a spiritual sense of their own depravity. This was the effect it had on Job. " I have heard of thee," says he, " by the hearing of the ear ; but now mine eye seeth thee : wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." And when the prophet Isaiah had seen the glory of the Most High in the temple, and the Seraphim covering their faces, and crying one to another, " Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of Hosts," he discovers the temper of his mind in this moving and beautiful lamentation ; " Wo is me, for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips ; for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts."

3. They find a mighty strength and power actuating and enlivening their graces. At other times they are in a dead and lifeless frame ; their faith is weak, their hope is languishing, and their duties performed in a cold and formal manner ; but no sooner is Christ present with them by his Spirit, than their bonds are loosed, their hearts are enlarged, and the flame of sacred affection is kindled in their souls. Thus, when the two disciples at Emmaus recollected what passed in their journey, while their Lord was conversing with them ; " Did not our hearts," say they, " burn within us, while he talked to us by the way, and opened

(a) Psal. lxxiii. 3.

“opened to us the scriptures?” Then, indeed, the Christian knows the meaning of that expression, “My soul followeth hard after thee, and runs in the path of commanded duty with cheerfulness and delight.”

4. Christ’s presence with his people in ordinances, produces a remarkable change in their temper and spirit. It leaves the mind more refined and abstracted from gross material things, and transformed into the image of God. As, when Moses came down from the Mount, his face was observed to shine; so, when the believer is admitted to communion with Christ, this necessarily produces on him a resemblance of his perfections, and by that means improves and brightens the Divine image within him. By every approach he makes to God, and every experience he obtains of his presence, he becomes more and more like him, and retires with something that adds beauty to his soul. Thus, as the apostle expresses it, “While we all, with open face, behold as in a glass the glory of the Lord, we are changed into the same image from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord.”

Lastly, They experience more vehement longings after the full enjoyment of God. For having learned that the Lord is gracious, and tasted, as it were, the first fruits of heaven, they are actuated with the most ardent desires to attain the full fruition. Instead of considering the most elevated lot in the world as their portion, they cry out with Simeon, when he had Christ in his arms, “Now, lettest thou thy servant depart in peace; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation.” Or with the Psalmist, “O that I had the wings of a dove, that I might fly away from this polluted, this unquiet world, and be at rest.”

It now only remains to make some practical improvement.

1. How awfully solemn is every part of gospel worship; as in it we are concerned, not with men alone,

lone, but with Christ himself, who is actually present! Happy were it, if, under this consideration, you received the word which we preach, as the Thessalonians did, not as the word of man, but as the word of God. For then it would work effectually in you, as it did in them. But, alas! our apprehensions of the word are weak and feeble. The greater part of gospel-hearers come to judge the ability of the speaker, rather than to have their minds instructed, their consciences searched, their lusts mortified, and their lives reformed: and hence it is, that the gospel meets with so little success. But if you would only consider that Christ himself is present in ordinances, and that you have to do with him whose eyes are as a flame of fire; how would this repress your vain and wandering thoughts, and dispose you to be serious! Suppose you saw the angels of heaven ministering around you, and narrowly observing your behaviour; would not this glorious appearance overcome your minds, and make you ashamed to trifle in the worship of God? Nay, the presence of an earthly monarch would compose us to reverence; how much more then ought we to be composed, when we consider that we are in the presence of the great God, who is infinitely just and holy, who knows our most secret thoughts, and will render to every man according to his works!

* 2. How precious are gospel-ordinances, and what ardent affection should every Christian bear to them! They are the spiritual walks of Christ, the places of resort and interview between him and his people, where he affords them the brightest discoveries of his glory, and the most delightful experience of his love. There your souls first met with Christ; there your joy in him commenced; and there, since that period, you have had many kind visits from him, and much comfortable communion. What reason, then, have you to prize and love the ordinances of religion,
and

and attend them with diligence ! This was the one thing the Psalmist desired and resolved to seek after ; for this, his soul panted with the utmost vehemence ; his flesh thirsted, yea, even fainted for the courts of the living God. “ The King,” says the Church, “ hath brought me into his chambers ; we will be glad and rejoice in thee ; we will remember thy love more than wine.”

3. Let us highly prize and be thankful for this presence of Christ by his Spirit in ordinances. This is what he has expressly promised and encouraged his people to ask and expect. This is a blessing suited to your present state ; and is indeed more needful and advantageous for you, than Christ’s bodily presence alone. It is the spirit that animates ordinances, which otherwise would be empty shadows and dry breasts ; and, by them, communicates nourishment, strength and comfort to our souls. In a word, by this spiritual presence, believers are prepared for heaven, raised to a well-grounded hope of it, and sometimes enabled to rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

4. What reason have we to lament that there is now so little of this Divine presence experienced in ordinances ? May we not say with the Church of old, where is thy zeal and thy strength ? and the yearnings of thy bowels to us-ward, are they restrained ? Our fathers have told us what great things the Lord hath done for them in their day ; how he took to him his mighty power, and rode forth in glory and majesty ; what admirable success attended the preaching of the gospel ; and how remarkably the blessed fruits of it appeared in the hearts and lives of its professors. But now, alas ! how little of this is to be seen ? What a dead, barren, and backsliding time has it long been amongst us ! The golden showers have been restrained ; the influences of the Spirit suspended ; and the consequence has been, that conversions are rare and dubious ; few sons and daughters are
born

born to God; and the hearts of Christians are not so quickened, warmed, and refreshed under ordinances as formerly. In a word, God has been provoked in a great measure to withdraw his presence, and to write upon our assemblies, *Ichabod*, "the glory is departed." And, O, what reason have we to bewail this! and particularly to mourn for our sins, our unbelief and impenitence, our contempt of the gospel, our earthly-mindedness and barrenness under the means of grace, which are the procuring causes of it? For, as the prophet tells us, "The Lord's hand is not shortened that it cannot save; neither is his ear heavy that he cannot hear;" but our iniquities have separated between us and our God, and provoked him to hide his face from us.

5. What reason, also, have we to lament that there are so few amongst us, who seriously desire and plead for the return of Christ's presence to ordinances? Few, alas, are saying with Moses, "I beseech thee shew me thy glory." The greater part of gospel-hearers seem to be insensible of their spiritual wants; nay, too many are blinded with self-opinion. Like the church of *Laodicea*, they imagine themselves rich, increased with goods, and standing in need of nothing. Even real Christians themselves, are apt to be secure and slothful; so that we may almost adopt the prophet's complaint against the Jews of old, and apply it to ourselves, "There is none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee." And hence it is that there are so few amongst us that are sincerely thirsting for Christ's presence in ordinances; for were we duly sensible of our need of it, and of our own blindness and misery without it, we would plead more seriously and earnestly with him for this blessing.

Lastly, Let me intreat and beseech you, that you would, with all seriousness, and in the most earnest manner, plead with Christ for the return of his presence

fence to ordinances. Ye that make mention of the name of the Lord, cease not day nor night to importune him, till he return and make Jerusalem a praise in the earth. Let us cry to him who is exalted, that he would pour out plentifully of his Holy Spirit upon his word and ordinances; that he would yet grant us days of power from on high, and revive his work in the midst of the years. And O what happiness would this produce amongst us! Then, indeed, would multitudes be converted to Christ, and the citizens of Zion abound: then would the daughters of Jerusalem rejoice, and be glad in their king.

But especially, let us earnestly plead with Christ for his presence with us, when we are assembled together to celebrate the sacred and august ordinance of the Supper. Say to him with Moses, "I beseech thee, shew me thy glory; if thy presence go not with us, carry us not up hence." And to excite you to this, consider, that this is a blessing which may be obtained, as the experience of the saints in all ages abundantly testifies. Consider, also, that it is absolutely necessary, in order to your profiting by the means of grace; and that many and great advantages will result to you from the enjoyment of this blessing. It will be a comfortable and satisfying evidence that God loves you; a blessed mean of transforming you into his image. It will animate and strengthen you to perform the most difficult duties, and resist the most powerful temptations; and finally, it will qualify and encourage you to come to the holy ordinance of the Supper, of which we have so near a prospect.

Since, then, the presence of Christ in ordinances is a blessing that may be obtained; since it is so absolutely necessary, and productive of such inestimable advantages; let me again intreat you to pray and plead with him for it. And do this with deep humility, under a becoming sense of your own unworthiness,

things, and the greatness of the favour which you ask. Do it also in faith, depending entirely on the merit of Christ's righteousness; and finally, with earnestness and fervency suitable to the value of the blessing.

And, if you are thus humble, serious, and importunate, in pleading with God; He, who is the hearer of prayer, will certainly regard the voice of your supplication; for he hears the desire of the humble, and will not forget their cry.

SER.

SERMON XXIX.

ON THE HAPPINESS OF A FUTURE STATE.

Matth. xxv. 46. *The righteous shall go into life eternal.*

ETernal life is the comprehensive sum of all that good, that a rational soul can hope for, or aspire after, as its happiness: And therefore it has pleased the infinitely wise God, in his moral government of the world, to propose it as the grand motive and encouragement to all that obedience and service which he requires of us; an encouragement, indeed, so truly great, a reward so transcendently glorious, that it may well animate us to encounter and overcome all the difficulties in the Christian journey, not only with patience and fortitude, but with alacrity and joy. This reward the text offers to our view, as the great object of our faith and hope, the noble prize for which we are to contend, and the happy issue with which all our sufferings and labours in religion shall be finally crowned: For the righteous shall go into life eternal.

Our Blessed Saviour having, from the 31st verse of this chapter, given a very lively and affecting description of his coming to judgment; having declared the

sentence that shall then be passed on the righteous and on the wicked, viz. a sentence of absolution, of solemn approbation, of a glorious reward, to the righteous; "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." But a sentence of condemnation, of amazing horror, to the wicked; "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." He concludes the awful scene with the verse which contains the words of our text: "And these" *i. e.* the wicked "shall go into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal."

Concerning the first of these, the deplorable condition of the wicked in another world, I shall not now discourse. But I would lead your thoughts to Mount Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem; to the general Assembly and Church of the First-born; to God, the Judge of all; to the spirits of just men made perfect; and to Jesus, the Mediator of the new covenant. And here, indeed, a beautiful scene opens to our view, a most delightful prospect to every sincere Christian, the serious contemplation of which is of admirable use to keep us stedfast and immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord.

In discoursing, then, on this delightful subject, after describing the character of the righteous who shall go into eternal life, I shall endeavour to give you some imperfect account of that future state of happiness into which they shall enter; and then make some practical improvement.

I. With respect to the character of the righteous, the apostle Paul describes it in few, but expressive words: "They are justified, washed and sanctified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God(a)."

1. They

(a) 1 Cor. vi. 11.

1. They are justified through the perfect righteousness of Christ imputed to them : And this, as it is their distinguishing privilege, displays also the exceeding riches of Divine grace : For God having accepted the obedience and satisfaction of his own Son, the Mediator, in their stead, he has placed it to their account, and reckons it theirs, as if they themselves had performed it ; and in this manner, they have obtained the forgiveness of their sins, and are accepted as righteous in the sight of God. Hence, in scripture, they are not only said to be justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Jesus ; but to be made the righteousness of God, *i. e.* righteous in the sight of God, through him.

2. They are also sanctified by renewing grace. And this indeed inseparably accompanies the former ; for, whom God justifies, them he also sanctifies. And thence, there results an inward sincerity and purity of mind and intention, a disposition to comply with every part of duty, and a conversation becoming the gospel of Christ. Not, that they are righteous in a strict and perfect sense. No ; the righteousness of the best and most improved saint, were it to be tried by the rule of perfection, and examined by the light of Divine holiness and knowledge, would be found extremely defective ; for in “ many things we offend all.” But the meaning is, they are really, though not completely, righteous ; their minds unfeignedly approve the whole law of God, their wills prevailing-ly consent to it, and the course of their actions manifests their zeal to observe it. In a word, perfection in holiness is their earnest wish, though not their actual attainment ; it is what they now aspire to, but cannot fully reach ; this being reserved as part of their promised reward, and a necessary ingredient in that future happiness for which they are now preparing.

This, then, is the character of the righteous, that which distinguishes them from the men of the world.

These are they who, having washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb, shall stand before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his heavenly temple. And this brings me,

II. To give you some account of that future state of happiness, here called eternal life, into which the righteous shall enter.

But, who is equal to such an undertaking? The grandeur of the subject dazzles our minds, transcends our most lofty conceptions, and cannot be represented by the most significant words. It doth not yet appear, says the apostle, what we shall be. It is a glory and a happiness yet to be revealed, of which we can form no distinct notion, till we enter within the veil, and are admitted into the heavenly sanctuary. Nay, to check presumptuous and unavailing curiosity, we are expressly told, that "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him"

As God, however, has been pleased to afford us some light concerning the future, and as we ought to be frequently employed in meditating on this delightful subject, I shall endeavour to give you, from Divine revelation, some imperfect account of that future state of happiness, which is promised to the righteous. And, O that, by the blessing of God, it may beget in you an ardent desire after it, and engage you to seek that temper and disposition of soul, which alone can qualify you for the enjoyment of it.

This state of future happiness is represented in the text, under the notion of eternal life, and to this I shall chiefly confine myself in what I am to say concerning it.

Life, you know, is the foundation of every enjoyment; nay, in the common estimation of men, it is the

the most desirable of earthly blessings. The true notion of it is, to be well and happy. The damned in hell are alive; but they are so far from enjoying life, that their deplorable and wretched condition is styled in scripture the second death: nay, the Spirit of truth will not allow the life of the wicked in this world to be true life, but speaks of them as dead in trespasses and sins. Even that decaying and frail life we now live, though we be so fondly in love with it, does hardly deserve the name of life. But the life of the blessed in heaven, is life in its utmost perfection; pure, unmixed, unallayed life. For,

1. They are perfectly delivered from every thing that makes the present life uneasy and burthensome.

In this state of mortality, there is nothing so grievous to a good man, to an exercised Christian, as sin. This is that law in his members that warreth against his mind. At intervals, in spite of all his exertions, his propensities to pleasure and folly are revived; and though the general tenor of his conduct evinces that his heart is right with God, yet he often feels the ardour of his love to him abated; he feels reluctance and aversion to persevere in his service, and is sometimes tempted to restrain prayer before him. These failures are a source of frequent lamentation; a source however, that, in this life, will never wholly be exhausted. Perfection, is the standard which man should set before him; but perfection he never can attain. He may attempt to purify his heart as God is pure; but iniquity must still prevail against him. In the life to come, however, he will obtain complete deliverance. The very being of sin will then be destroyed, every evil inclination eradicated, and the soul for ever freed from this intestine enemy. Think with yourselves, ye children of God, what a happy life you would lead here, if sin did not disturb your peace, if it did not imbitter your comforts, and impress you with the dread of future wrath. How

happy, then, are they, to whom an entrance is at last administered into that world, in which its power is no more felt? Happy indeed, unspeakably happy, those perfected spirits of the just, whose warfare with sin is now ended, who have obtained a complete victory, an eternal triumph over it!

But again, all the natural consequences, the penal effects of sin, will be excluded from that happy state. These now prey upon our transitory life, and diminish its comforts. Our sweets here are still attended with a sting, and great enjoyments bring greater sorrow; but, there, they will not disturb our repose. The inhabitants of that upper house shall not say they are sick, neither shall they grieve; for God will wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away. In a word, in the midst of that innumerable assembly of the blessed, there is not one eye that weeps, one breast that sighs, or one tongue that complains. How happy then are those glorified saints, whose fears are vanished with their guilt; and who, as they shall sin, so they shall sorrow no more!

Finally, the temptations of Satan, and of a wicked world, shall have no place there. There, the wicked cease from troubling; there, the weary are at rest, and they hear not the voice of the oppressor. Then, Satan, their implacable enemy, will be bound in chains, and cast into the bottomless pit. The Christian, once landed on the heavenly shore, is safe, and eternally out of his reach. From him he has thenceforth nothing to fear. And, O, with what pleasure will he look back, as it were, on the amazing dangers he has escaped, on the boisterous waves by which he had been tossed, while in this waste and howling wilderness! And how cheerfully will he join with his fellow saints in that triumphant song; "Now is come
"salvation, and the kingdom of our God, and the
"power

“ power of his Christ ; for the accuser and tempter
“ is cast down, and will never lift up his head to
“ hurt and afflict us any more !”

2. The happiness of the righteous in a future state, will consist not only in a complete deliverance from every thing that is troublesome and uneasy, but in the full possession of the greatest good of which their nature is capable.

And this is what is chiefly meant by eternal life in the text; for that can mean nothing less than life in its greatest perfection. We then truly live, when we draw our first breath in the air of heaven; when we open our eyes on the beauties and glory of the unseen world, and enter on the works and joys of the heavenly state. That indeed is the true birth-day of a saint : so that this expression denotes the affluence of all that can render our state completely happy.

I might here observe to you, that the bodies of the saints at the resurrection, will be made more perfect than they were in this world. Our present earthly bodies are perpetually tending to corruption; and, how admirable soever their structure may be, they are at best but houses of clay, whose foundation is in the dust. But then, they shall be raised incorruptible and glorious bodies, and be purified to that degree, as to partake of the immortality of the soul. “ The dead,” the apostle tells us, “ shall be raised incorruptible;” “ for this corruptible must put on incorruption, and “ this mortal must put on immortality;” and then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, “ Death is swallowed up in victory (i).”

The happiness of this blessed state, however, will chiefly consist in the perfect and heavenly life of the soul; for, then, all its powers will be enlarged, and its desires satisfied.

The understanding will be enlightened with new discoveries of useful and noble truths; with a more clear,

clear, certain, and full apprehension of many things, concerning which we now doubt, or know but little.

What a poor, short-sighted creature is man, in this world! Even those who, by much labour and study, have attained to the knowledge of more than others; yet, how few are the things they know, in comparison with those of which they are ignorant? But when the saints arrive at the mansions of glory, those scales will drop from their eyes, and a glorious scheme of Divine truth be presented to them. Then shall they know God himself, the All in All, the perfection of excellence and of love. Here, it is but a small portion of himself, that he hath revealed to the sons of men. What is his name, and what is his Son's name, who can tell? But, then, they shall know Him, even as they also are known; for they shall see Him as he is. Not that they will be able to comprehend the Divine nature: No, that is not possible for the most perfect finite being. But they will get such discoveries of his glorious perfections, of his incomparable excellencies, as infinitely transcend our present conceptions. "Now," says the apostle, "we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face (c)." And what an infinite pleasure must the contemplation of such an all-glorious object afford to such raised and elevated minds, which by every new discovery are still enlarged to discover more, and have still new light pouring in upon their ravished souls?—But further, they will also have a far more comprehensive and delightful knowledge of the works of God, than we can possibly attain to, in this state of darkness and imperfection. Here, many things appear to us crooked, which we know not how to make straight. The steps of God are often in the deep; his counsels are unsearchable, and his ways past finding out. But, in the realms of light, the saints will see into those dark mazes of providence, which so
much

much perplex the minds of good men: Wherefore the wicked prosper, and the workers of iniquity flourish apace; why the righteous are so much afflicted, and waters of a full cup wrung out to them. Here, we see, as it were, but one end of the chain of providence; there, we shall view it from beginning to end, and behold all the links admirably joined and fastened together: And then, the whole scheme being viewed at once, all the seeming blemishes will disappear; and not only the justice and holiness, but the wisdom and goodness of the Divine government, will appear unexceptionable. The great mystery of our redemption, that mysterious wisdom of God, will also be then unfolded to the saints, and employ their never-ceasing admiration and praise. In a word, they will then be able to reconcile all the fancied contradictions in the conduct of providence, and in the glorious scheme of our redemption by a crucified Saviour; nay, they will see and admire the whole, as all-perfect, harmonious, and beautiful. Now, we see by faith; but faith will then cease, and be perfected in vision. We now see God by a reflection of his perfections, from his works; but the veil will be then drawn aside, and we shall see him face to face. Glorious day! when those shadows shall fly away, and the Sun of righteousness irradiate our souls with his divine light and splendour.

The happiness of this life of the saints in glory, will also consist in the perfect conformity of their wills to the nature and will of God. For this is the happy and necessary result of their immediate vision of Him. Accordingly, when the apostle John gives us that summary account of what we now know, concerning the glory and happiness of this future state, he conjoins these two branches of it: "We know," says he, "that when he shall appear, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as he is (i)."

With

With what difficulty is it, that even the most serious Christians, while in this valley of tears, get their wills brought to a compliance with the will of God? What aversion to their duty are they often doomed to feel? But there, like the angels in heaven, they will be all resignation and compliance with his will.

And as they will be thus perfectly conformed to the will of God, so they will be exercised in the most vigorous acts of Divine love. Love, is that grace which, the apostle tells us, will abide, when prophecies fail, when tongues cease, and when knowledge vanishes away (c). It is an immortal grace, that lives beyond time, and will live and flourish while eternity lasts. The saints above, as they know the ever-blessed God, and contemplate his glory by immediate vision; so, they love him with the most pure and ardent affection. There, perfect knowledge kindles perfect love. And, indeed, it is impossible that they can behold so much beauty and goodness, such vast unmeasurable glory, without loving them. It is the great complaint of the pious here on earth, that their love is languid and faint. I appeal to your own experience: When you attempt to love him, and to raise your affections to things above, what sinful damps and coldness hang heavy on your minds? What allurements offer to entice you from your duty? Even when you get nearest to your God and Redeemer, still you find reason to complain of your distance, and to utter the psalmist's passionate wish; "When shall I come, and appear before God?" But, in the church triumphant, there will be no such complaints; for that love, which is here but as a smoking flax, will be there a bright and active flame. Nor will it vent itself, as it often does here, in mournful desires after an absent God, but in most satisfying complacency in his eternal presence and love. To render the saints unspeakably happy, every thing in heaven will conspire;

the

(c) 1. Cor. xiii. 8.

the glories of the place, the society of angels and fellow saints, the serenity of their own pure and immaculate souls ; but, above all, the enjoyment of their glorious God and gracious Redeemer. For, as they know that they love him, and feel this love to be the warmest affection of their hearts ; so, they know that he also loves them. Nay, every moment they taste of his love, and live upon it with inconceivable delight. And, O, what an unknown satisfaction must arise in the mind from the full assurance of the love of God ! What tongue can express, what heart conceive, the sacred pleasure that fills every soul in heaven, under the immediate and lively sensations of this Divine love ! Is communion with God on earth so exquisitely delightful, that a gracious soul would not exchange one minute of it for all the most luxurious pleasures of the sons of men ? Is it so delightful, at this humble distance, to taste of the stream ? How inconceivable then must be the happiness of dwelling at the fountain head, and drinking of those rivers of pleasure, that flow at God's right hand for evermore !

Another thing that will render the life of the righteous in heaven unspeakably happy, is, their exercise and employment. In the scriptures, they are represented, as resting not day nor night ; as praising and singing Hallelujahs to Him that sitteth upon the throne, and to the Lamb ; saying, " Worthy art thou, O Lord, to receive glory, and honour, and power ; for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created : To Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father ; to Him be glory and dominion, for ever and ever." Their exercise, in a word, is one continued triumph over sin and Satan, and a constant celebration of the praises of redeeming love : And, O, what harmonious melody will this make, when every soul is filled with love, and every tongue resounds the praises of their King !

King! when they have no need of temples in which to perform their worship, nor instrumental duties to accent and kindle their devotion! for the Lord God Almighty, and the Lamb, are the temple thereof. Blessed indeed are they that dwell in God's house above; they will be still praising Him.

I shall only add, that that which will complete their happiness, is, its everlasting duration. They shall go into life eternal; and this endears the mansions of glory to the righteous, as much as it will im-bitter the gloomy regions of hell to the wicked. No years nor ages measure the delights of heaven. The ransomed of the Lord, when they come to Zion, have everlasting joy on their heads. The inheritance is incorruptible, and fadeth not away. It is an eternal, as well as exceeding weight of glory; and, when millions of ages are past and gone, a happy immortality is still before them. And what an accent will it give to the praises of the redeemed, when, in the triumph of full security in the Divine promises, they can say, "This God is our God for ever and ever!" Here is happiness, as it were, redoubled by the comfortable reflection, that He will be their portion through eternity, and that they shall be ever with the Lord.

Thus I have endeavoured to give you some imperfect account of that eternal life, which is promised to the righteous in a future world.

And now, have we not the highest reason to admire and adore the exceeding riches of God's goodness? This reward is entirely of grace, and not of debt. The infinitely great Jehovah, was perfectly happy in the enjoyment of his own essential glory. He had no need of our services, far less was under any obligation to reward them. Justly then may we exclaim with the pious psalmist, "Lord, what is man, that thou art mindful of him? or the son of man,"

"man, that thou shouldst thus visit him?" Upon our apostasy from Him, he might justly have doomed us all to endless misery, without giving us the most distant prospect of happiness. What reason, then, have we to adore and worship Him, who, in his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again to a lively hope, and given encouragement to seek after eternal life through his Son!

But again, what returns of gratitude and praise do we owe to our Blessed Redeemer, who laid down his own precious life, that we might obtain salvation and eternal glory! If the Son of God had not come into the world, life and immortality had not been brought to light by the gospel. How did he abase himself, that we might be exalted! For our sake he became poor, that we, through his poverty, might be made rich: Nay, he cheerfully submitted to death, even the death of the cross, that we might inherit eternal life. What obligations, then, do we ly under to the Blessed Redeemer, through whose merits and intercession it is, that we are admitted into the mansions of glory!

But further, hence we see, that it is no vain thing to serve the Lord. No; verily there is a reward for the righteous. God will give grace and glory, and he will withhold no good thing from them that walk uprightly. Let it then be your greatest concern, you who are still unbelievers, and thus have no title to eternal life; let it be your greatest concern, that you may be of the happy number of the righteous, who shall at last go into it. Give all diligence to get an interest in the imputed righteousness of Christ; that, being justified by faith, you may be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. Labour after inherent holiness. Implore Divine grace to make a sanctifying change in your nature. Take up with nothing short of it. Dream not of entering into the kingdom of God without being born from above. Remember, you must live the life of the right-

teous, if you would have your latter end like his. For it is an established truth, that without holiness no man shall see the Lord.

And how should the prospect of this eternal and exceeding weight of glory animate you, who are sincere believers in Christ Jesus, to be daily purifying yourselves even as he is pure ! If any spark of true ambition dwells in you, will not such a prospect kindle it ? will not this enliven your affections, and arm you with sacred resolution ? An eternity of joy, a kingdom with God, a crown of life, and righteousness that fadeth not away ; How can you think of these, and not be pressing forward toward the mark, for the prize of our high calling that is with God, through Jesus Christ ?

You are now indeed in a militant state ; a state of trial and conflict. But, take comfort ; this warfare will soon be over, and then will come the day of everlasting peace and triumph. If you are now faithful to the death, your exalted Redeemer has promised to give you the crown of life ; and that in the mean time his grace shall be sufficient for you. Wherefore, be ye stedfast, immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, soasmuch as ye know, that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.

And now, may the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you : To Him be glory and dominion, for ever and ever. Amen.

THE SUBSTANCE OF

A SERMON preached at *Strathmiglo*, on the
DEATH of the Rev. GEORGE LYON,

BY

The Rev. JAMES LISTER, A. M. Minister of the
Gospel at *Auchtermuchty*.

Pfalm cxvi. 15. *Precious in the sight of the Lord is
the death of his saints.*

THIS house in which you have often experienced the goodness of the Lord, is to-day an house of mourning. Nor are you the only mourners in Zion on this occasion; others are assembled to weep with you, and to bewail the loss which you and the church of Christ have sustained. Painful is the task assigned to me; but if, in this case, the feelings of despondence ought to be checked, our sorrows will surely be greatly alleviated, while we reflect, that "precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints."

It is evident, that some remarkable deliverance from great sorrow and trouble, is celebrated by David in this psalm; and the different opinions respecting the event to which it refers, do not affect the sense of the text. The sentiment expressed in these words, naturally rises in a pious mind, when reflecting on the gracious interposition of heaven in the hour of imminent dan-

ger and distress. "The sorrows of death compassed me, and the pains of hell gat hold upon me: I found trouble and sorrow." In this situation, he is described as calling upon the name of the Lord to deliver him.—Nor did he call in vain: the Lord bowed down his ear; he heard his supplications, and helped him.

With grateful emotions of heart, the Psalmist now celebrates the praises of his Almighty Saviour: "Return unto thy rest, O my soul, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee." This leads him to remark as a general truth, that "precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints."

These words evidently point out to us, what I propose, in the following discourse, to consider; *First*, The character of those who are here denominated saints; And, *Secondly*, In what respects their death is precious in the sight of the Lord.

I. The *first* thing proposed, is to offer some remarks concerning the character of those who are mentioned in the text. The term, saints, literally signifies *holy persons*, both in the original language, and in our translation. It is a designation frequently given to the godly, as expressive of their genuine character; and it would be no less absurd, to call an unholy person a *saint*, than to call a righteous person a sinner. The Lord, who is glorious in holiness, and the inexhaustible fountain of perfection, can have no delight in the ungodly and impure. Hence, an irreversible decree hath passed in heaven, that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord;" and as the flame consumeth the stubble, so will the fire of his holiness burn up the ungodly, who with fallen spirits shall have their portion in that lake of torments, whose smoke is ascending for ever. Hence, God saith of his own people; "Thou art a holy people unto the Lord thy God: the Lord thy God hath chosen

“ chosen thee to be a special people to himself, above
“ all people that are on the face of the earth. And
“ they shall call them the *holy* people, the redeemed
“ of the Lord.” This is the reason why they are
denominated saints, or *holy*. The term implies, that
they are cleansed by the blood and spirit of the Sa-
viour, to be an holy people both in heart and life.

Infinite wisdom and goodness have devised means
sufficiently efficacious to renew and sanctify the most
impure. “ Come, now, and let us reason together,
“ saith the Lord: Though your sins be as scarlet,
“ they shall be white as snow; though they be red
“ like crimson, they shall be as wool.” How de-
plorable the condition of those to whom this is ad-
dressed! They are characterised as a sinful nation,
a people laden with iniquity; “ a seed of evil-doers,
“ children that are corrupters, who have forsaken
“ the Lord, and provoked the Holy One of Israel.”

Sin is the great cause which excludes creatures
from the favour of their Creator, and draws upon
them innumerable evils. It renders the life of the
sinner miserable, and his death awful. Before men
can either enjoy God’s favour here, or be fitted for
the immediate visions of his glory hereafter, their
souls must be purified by the washing of regeneration,
and renewing of the Holy Ghost: they must be
washed in the blood of the Lamb. Hence, David,
the man according to God’s own heart, was wont to
pray, “ Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity,
“ and cleanse me from my sin. Create in me a clean
“ heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within
“ me.”—He remembered what God said to Israel;
“ Ye shall sanctify yourselves, and ye shall be holy;
“ for I am Holy.”

When John was favoured with a vision of the re-
deemed, who stood before the Throne, and before
the Lamb; he beheld them arrayed in white robes,
with palms in their hands; and was informed, that

they were washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb. All, therefore, who sincerely hope for immortal life, will purify themselves, as God is pure.

But, not only are the saints purified from the defilement of sin and vice ; holy principles are implanted in their souls, and that assemblage of Christian graces, which constitutes their likeness to their heavenly Father. They are not only counted of the family of God, by adoption ; but they are indeed his children, being formed after his image, and made partakers of the Divine nature, having God dwelling in them, and they in God.

As rays unite to form a bright luminous splendour ; so, justice, truth, mercy, love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and temperance, unite in perfect harmony, and constitute that holiness, which is the delight of the saints and faithful in Christ Jesus. A holy life, corresponding to those fruits of the Spirit, completes the character of those who are saints.

This truth is confirmed by the psalm before us. It begins with a display of that love, which glows in the heart of all the saints, and which powerfully constrains them to that obedience which is sincere, cheerful, and uniform. Hence the resolution to walk before the Lord in the land of the living. It was the Almighty's command to Abraham ; " Walk before me, and be thou perfect : " and it is the fixed determination of every true saint, to walk before the Lord unto all pleasing ; to walk as in his presence, and under his omniscient eye ; and that not on a few particular occasions, and at stated times only, but regularly and uniformly through their whole lives. Thus, those virtues and internal graces, not only beautify and adorn the soul, but serve to produce obedience in those whom the Lord hath set apart for himself, and redeemed to be a peculiar people, zealous of good works.

In this manner, their faintship is visible to the world, and holiness to the Lord established in their character. This holiness is not founded upon constraint, nor does it depend on the feeble efforts of an apostate heart; but is established by the influences of an Almighty Redeemer, in whose sight, their death, as well as their life, is precious.

This leads me to the *second* general head of discourse, which was to shew in what respects their death is precious in his sight.

II. It was sin that brought death into the world; and which, though eventually a blessing to the saints, is a formidable foe, from which human nature shrinks with aversion. This psalm, therefore, celebrates the goodness of God in delivering from death; and contains a prayer, that the life which he had so graciously preserved, might for the future be spent in his service. This remarkable preservation of the psalmist's life, was the reason of the observation in the text; that "precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his faints."

Their death is precious in his sight, in that he is pleased often to bless them with length of days, and to bring them to the grave in a good old age, as a shock of corn comes in his season. The sons of violence and strife frequently rise up against the saints of God. But, their life and all that is dear to them, are deposited in his hands as a sacred trust; he forsaketh them not in any case, and in his sight their life as well as their death is precious. He redeems their souls from deceit and violence, and will not permit their blood wantonly to be shed: nor will he bring them to the grave, till death, to them, become great gain.

Old age is in a peculiar manner promised to the saints. "They shall inherit the earth, while the wicked, who are in great power, and spread themselves like a green bay tree, shall be cut down like the grass, and pass away."—"The Lord knoweth
" the

“ the days of the upright : they shall dwell in the
“ land, and the perfect shall remain in it : but the
“ wicked shall be cut off from the earth, and the
“ transgressors shall be rooted out of it.”

The death of the saints is precious in the sight of the Lord ; because, by it, he oftentimes delivers them from the evil to come. “ The righteous perisheth,” saith the prophet, “ and no man layeth it to heart ;
“ and merciful men are taken away, none considering that the righteous are taken away from the evil
“ to come.” The saints are the pillars of the world, and their death portends evil to the place and nation in which they have lived. There were not ten righteous persons in Sodom, and dreadful ruin came. The earth itself is preserved for their sakes ; and “ when the
“ Lord cometh out of his place, to punish the inhabitants of it for their iniquity,” the saints are removed by death, that they may not be the sad spectators of such direful calamities. Thus, Hezekiah comforts himself, that he should not live to see the Babylonish captivity, which was foretold by the prophet Isaiah : “ Good is the word of the Lord, saith
“ he, which thou hast spoken.”

I would not presage ill to the country, nor to the Church of God. But, when we consider the many heinous and presumptuous sins of this nation, the efforts of profanity to defeat, of infidelity to reject, and of dissipation to elude the force of religion upon the mind ; the strange inconsistency between the belief and practice of many ; and the present daring licentiousness, and violation of all order among a certain class of men, whose prosperity seems to destroy them : When we consider those things, those signs of the times, the stoutest-hearted of us all must tremble at the consequences. Have we not just reason to dread the judgments of offended Heaven, and that the saint departed, whose death we this day lament, is taken away from the evil to come, which perhaps we may
live

live to see? "Help, Lord, for the godly man ceaseth ;
" for the faithful fail from among the children of
" men."

Again, precious in the eyes of the Lord is the death of his saints : because, he deprives death of its sting, and encourages them in the moment of departure to commit their spirits to his care, and rely with confidence on his ability to save to the uttermost all those who sincerely believe in his mediation. They are at all times his peculiar care : but, then, his almighty arm is stretched out in a particular manner to support them : and with that voice which called all nature into existence, he bids them not fear, for He is with them ; even He, who has the keys of death and of the unseen state in his hand, who himself has encountered the King of terrors, and who knows what support they need in the dying hour. It was on this account that David sung with triumphant joy, " Though I walk through the valley of the
" shadow of death, yet will I fear no evil ; for thou art
" with me, thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."

Many tender scenes indeed are presented to the mind of a dying saint ! The very idea of death must affect more or less even the gayest heart : It cannot be dressed out in any form that will reconcile the reflecting mind to pass it by without the sensations of solemnity and awe. The pallid dejection, pining grief, and anxious care of tender connections, with whom it is painful to part, cannot prevent the gradual approach of the last inevitable hour.

In his last moments the saint experiences that his death is precious in the sight of God. This gracious promise, replete with every comfort, fortifies him against desponding fears, and brightens his soul with a ray of hope, when this world darkens on his view. Sympathising angels hover round his departing spirit, ready to conduct it to the realms of glory. That benevolent Saviour, who himself trod the thorny paths

paths of life, and who hath taken from death the dreaded sting, is at that time more particularly present, to strengthen every grace, to fortify the mind against the terrors of the powers of darkness, and to bring comfort to the bed of languishment when the body is fast wasting away. Believing and rejoicing in Him who is their salvation and their glory, they depart in peace, willing to be absent from the body, and present with the Lord; having a foretaste of promised joys. Thus they triumph in the hour of death; for God the Saviour is with them. To such, the passage through the dark vale loses in a manner all its terrors; and the tremendous gates of death are the portals which lead to those pleasures at God's right hand, where, according to St Paul's emphatic language, they shall be filled with all the fulness of God!

In his sight the death of his saints is precious, because by it he brings them to everlasting life. There is in all mankind, unbiaſſed by prejudice, an earnest desire and preſage of immortality; and the belief of a future existence is inseparably connected with our idea of an all-powerful, wiſe, juſt and good God.—The darkness that reſted on this proſpect, notwithstanding the general prevalence of the doctrine, is now removed by the goſpel of Chriſt.—He hath brought life and immortality to light, diſpelled thoſe clouds that reſted on the grave, and pointed out an endless existence beyond the darkness of its domain. This is the great perfection of the Chriſtian inſtitution, that it gives the clear promiſe and ſure hopes of eternal life: It repreſents death as a departure hence, in order to our being with our glorified Immanuel, who lives and reigns for ever; and by whom the ſaints ſhall be preſented faultleſs before the preſence of the Divine Glory with exceeding joy.

We are to conſider that everlasting reſt aſſigned to the ſaints, as the purchaſe of his merits and peculiar ſufferings.

sufferings, as one of the greatest and noblest effects of his ascension into heaven, and of his powerful mediation for us at the right hand of God. The felicity of heaven is indeed the gift of God; but that gift is acquired and secured for us through Jesus Christ our Lord.—“I give unto my sheep,” saith our Lord, “the prize of eternal life; and they shall never perish; neither shall any one pluck them out of my hand.” This eternal life imports more than we can express or comprehend; something more excellent than what our eye hath seen, or our ear hath heard, and beyond what our heart can conceive. Crowns, sceptres and triumphs, worldly success and prosperity, are but faint resemblances of this eternal, unspeakable, and inconceivable happiness. No pain, nor sorrow, nor death, are there. There is fulness of joy and happiness for ever; in kind and degree, too great to be expressed, and too glorious to be comprehended, by men who dwell in bodies of clay. Nor shall the souls of the saints only be thus blessed and happy. Their bodies, which now rest in hope, shall also be raised with immortal beauty and excellence. They are still under the guardianship of that blessed Saviour, who will not suffer one atom to perish; who was himself the “first fruits of them that sleep;” who, by the resurrection of his own body, has consecrated theirs to a blessed immortality. “For, since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead: and therefore, when Christ who is our life shall appear, we shall also appear with him in glory.” By that Almighty power by which he made the worlds, and upholds them in being, by which he nailed our sins to the cross, triumphed over the King of terrors, and conquered all the legions of the prince of darkness, he will also rescue all our captive bodies from the power of the grave, raise them up in his own most glorious likeness, and “swallow up death in victory.” He will
command

command the four winds to restore those bodies which they have driven over the face of the earth, and scattered into ten thousand particles of dust. "The winds and storms will fulfil his word;" and all the generations of men will return to a life that endureth for ever. "I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death."—"O death, I will be thy plague; O grave, I will be thy destruction." In the joyful prospect of this happy event, a dying saint can even now triumph over death, and say, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? Thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ." Thus precious was the death of your late dear and justly honoured pastor, who waited for the mercy of our Lord Jesus to eternal life.

Upon this solemn occasion, you will surely excuse me for indulging the feelings of my own heart, while I bear this public testimony to his worth, who was my much valued father and friend. By this tribute of respect to his memory, I mean to show that distinguishing grace of God by which he walked in all his commandments and ordinances so blameless. Though he excelled in every virtue, humility was a prominent feature in his character; and, by this honourable mark of distinction, he proved his relation to his humble and condescending Saviour.

Though abstracted in a great measure from the world, he had a just discernment of men and characters. The venerable gravity of his countenance awed the wicked into silence, reverence and respect; while the affable sweetness and gentleness of his manners, conciliated the favour and friendship of all who had the pleasure of his acquaintance. His mind was ever serious, and he was often silent in mixed conversation: yet, with a few chosen friends, no one was more cheerful. Possessed of that "charity which is
" the

“the bond of perfectness,” he was slow to believe evil reports, and was ever ready to repress those calumnies, which malice invents, and spite utters.

Because he was precious in the sight of the Lord, like all his people he was frequently in the furnace of affliction; and with a truly Christian resignation, he bore every sorrow. This was very apparent, when he was exercised by a providence exceedingly afflictive, the death of his eldest son, an amiable and excellent young man, whose temper and talents had excited in all his friends and companions many a flattering and fond hope. Under that afflicting stroke, like Aaron, he “held his peace;” and was calmly resigned to the disposal of that infinite Wisdom, which best knows when to give, and when to take away.

He was endued with a sweet and affectionate natural temper, the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which made his family happy. In him, at once, were seen the virtues of the Father, the Husband, the Master, and the Friend; in all which characters, he eminently adorned his religious profession and his public office.

As a minister of the gospel, you of this congregation in particular well know how he conducted himself;—with what devout affections and propriety he poured out his prayers before God, with you, and for you;—with what seriousness and fidelity he preached to you the doctrines and duties of our holy religion,—not in the words of man’s wisdom, but in that plainness and simplicity of language which constitute the true sublime, and which best become the servants of a crucified Master. He preached not himself, but Christ Jesus the Lord, who was all his salvation and desire, and the only hope for guilty perishing sinners. There was something moving in the manner of his address; and the mild benevolence of his aspect, engaged the heart in his favour, before he uttered a word. He always spoke as one in earnest;

and all who attended his holy ministrations, were confirmed in the persuasion, that he himself felt what he delivered to them. He was indeed a son of consolation, who could succour and comfort the feeble and disconsolate, and teach the mournful eye to look up to heaven. His Master's work was constantly on his heart; and he was often known to preach, when the state of his health required him to desist. Nor did he serve God with that which had cost him nothing; he applied himself in earnest to the duties of his office: and few ministers have spent more time in holy solitude, in secret prayer, in reading the scriptures, and in writing out his sermons at large. In a word, he spent, and was spent, in his pastoral labours; and the Lord owned his ministry to the conviction of many, who will be his joy and crown in the day of the Lord. Ye are witnesses to the fidelity and diligence with which he discharged the duties of his office; by preaching the word, catechising and exhorting his flock in private; especially the poor, the widows and the fatherless, in their affliction. Ye are witnesses, and God also is witness, in what a holy, and just, and unblameable manner, he behaved himself amongst you to his dying hour, adorning the doctrine which he maintained and inculcated.—As the life of this eminent saint was useful, laborious, and exemplary: so, his death was serene, comfortable, and precious in the sight of the Lord;—so precious, that he was mercifully exempted from tedious sickness and painful sufferings, the usual forerunners of the King of terrors.

On the morning of that day which removed him to a better state, he was seized with an apoplexy, which proved fatal. From the moment he was seized with the disorder, he continued totally insensible, till about 7 o'clock in the evening; when he quietly fell asleep in Jesus, whom he loved and adored; and his happy soul took its triumphant flight to those mansions of
eternal

eternal glory,—where, with those who have converted many to righteousness, he shall shine for ever and ever. “Mark the perfect man, and behold the up-
“right; for the latter end of that man is peace.” The event itself, and the very sudden way in which it pleased God to take him out of the world, are loud calls to us all, to hold fast the same faith, to rely on the same righteousness, and to be followers of them who through faith are now inheriting the promises. To this congregation and to surrounding spectators, their language is—“Be ye also ready; for in such an
“hour as ye think not, the Son of man cometh. “Blessed is that servant, whom his Lord, when he
“cometh, shall find so doing.” I shall therefore conclude with the address of the apostle to the Hebrews:
“We desire that every one of you do shew the same
“diligence, to the full assurance of hope unto the
“end.—Remember him who hath had the rule over
“you, and hath” (long and faithfully) “spoken
“unto you the word of God; whose faith follow,
“considering the end of his conversation.”

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